

Media Ethics

JOURNALISM 61-312, Section 201C
(Tuesday-Friday, 9:15 a.m. to noon; Clow 128)

Summer 2009

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Office hours: Tuesday through Friday, noon to 1 p.m.

ABOUT THE COURSE

The title basically describes this course. Ethical values, however, do not exist in the abstract; they grow out of the relationships of people and institutions. Those relationships are often complex and confused, involving conflicts of roles, moral rules and reasoning. Using case studies, problems and readings, this course will provide practical methods and experience for sorting through ethical conflicts you might encounter as a journalist.

We will talk about ethical values and theory in the context of real problems. We will study ethical dilemmas encountered by print and Internet journalists, public relations practitioners, broadcasters, entertainers and people in advertising. Many case studies will be drawn from current or recent news events, including ones involving integrity in journalism.

Making good decisions depends on more than ethical values. We also will examine other critical factors that shape the behavior of journalists, including economic constraints and political ideology.

OBJECTIVES

** To develop moral sensitivity to journalism issues (seeing ethical values at stake and alternative courses of action) and people (seeing how your decisions often affect the welfare of others).

** To learn a systematic approach to analyzing ethical issues, especially in applying ethical reasoning to specific problems.

** To understand the basic approaches to ethics in journalism, including such terms as absolutism and relativism, libertarianism and social responsibility, and utilitarianism and deontology.

** To explore what it means to be a journalist when professional and personal values clash with institutional restraints on behavior.

COURSE METHODS

Most classes will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Some days the class will begin with a case or film. Every day will be an opportunity to join in a conversation about issues in the media.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

** A tentative course schedule is included. It is *tentative*, so students are responsible for any updates provided by the professor during the four-week class. The reading assignments are critical to understanding the issues being discussed, so keep up with them. The class will be more useful if everyone uses the assigned material to contribute to the discussions.

** You are expected to read a newspaper or news Web site, news magazines and trade publications, and watch newscasts and news programs so you will be aware of events in the media. Additional readings will be assigned.

** Class participation is expected. Except in extreme cases, absences must be approved beforehand. Assignments turned in late will be subject to a penalty of two letter grades for each calendar day after the assigned deadline.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

This is a course in ethics, and students are expected to follow ethical practices. That means university rules on cheating and plagiarism will be strictly followed. Integrity in the media will be a key focus of this class.

GRADING

Grades will be determined by two exams (60% of the course grade), group debates (15%), an essay on diversity in an age of high-tech journalism (20%), and on class participation (5%). The course grade will be determined on this basis: 92 percent average and above, A; 90 to 91, A,B; 83-89, B; 80-82, B,C; 73-79, C; 70-72, C,D; 65-69, D.

REQUIRED TEXT

Clifford G. Christians, Mark Fackler, Kathy Brittain McKee, Peggy J. Kreshel and Robert H. Woods Jr., *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, Eighth Edition, Allyn and Bacon, 2009.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- July 14 Syllabus review
Approaches to studying media ethics
What is the right answer? Is there one?
Philosophical foundations
Analyzing issues: A methodology
Ethics in the news
Fabrication, plagiarism
Assignment: Your Greatest Ethical Dilemma
(Due next class for discussion, and turn in)
Readings: Introduction, Cases 1, 2, 3, 4
- July 15 Discuss Your Greatest Ethical Dilemma items
Rating your values
Guiding principles, questions
Pressures on journalists
Monopoly and the game of journalism
Technology and the changing landscape
Assignment: Essay on diversity in an age of
high-tech journalism
Readings: Cases 7, 8, 9, 10
- July 16 Telling the truth, levels of truth
Use of Deception
Codes of ethics, ombudsmen
Assignment: Themes, teams for group debates
Readings: Cases 11, 12, 13, 15, 16
- July 17 Conflicts of interest
Reporters and sources
Social responsibility
Diversity, portrayal of minorities in news
Readings: Cases 19, 20, 21, 22
- July 21 Invasion of Privacy
Photojournalism, manipulating pictures
Good taste, good sense
Readings: Cases 61, 64, 65, 70
- July 22 Violence and entertainment; docudramas
Readings: Cases 67, 68, 74, 76, 77

- July 23 The censors of sight, sound and sex
Profits and responsibility
Assignment: Work on group debates
Prepare for Exam I
- July 24 **Exam I:** Covers Introduction in the textbook,
cases assigned, handouts/discussions to date
- July 28 **Group debates**
Readings: Cases 43, 44, 45, 47
- July 29 **Finish group debates**
Persuasion and public communication
Readings: Cases 49, 51, 52, 53(I and II), 56
- July 30 Truth in PR
When loyalties are in conflict
Readings: Cases 57, 59, 23, 24, 25
- July 31 Social responsibility in public messages
Commercialized life
Readings: Cases 27, 28, 29, 30
- Aug. 4 Setting the agenda in advertising
The image-makers
Readings: Cases 33, 34, 36, 37
- Aug. 5 Targeting an audience in a diverse society
Media concerns of advertising influence
Readings: Cases 38, 39, 40, 42
- Aug. 6 **Diversity/high-tech journalism essay due**
Advertising ethics
Diversity in advertising
Prepare for second exam
- Aug. 7 **Exam II:** Covers discussions, class handouts,
and cases assigned since the first exam