

Media Ethics

JOURNALISM 61-312

(Tuesday and Thursday, 9:40 to 11:10 a.m.; Sage 4212)

Fall Semester 2012

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Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 9 to 10 a.m.;

Wednesday, 9 to 11 a.m. (and by appointment)

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 consist of a combination of lecture and discussion. Some days the class will begin with case studies, or perhaps with a film clip. Every day will be an opportunity for students to join in the conversation about issues in the media.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

** A *tentative* course schedule is included. 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 news publication 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 are likely to be assigned during the interim.

** 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 student performance on two exams (65 percent of the course grade), small-group debates/points-counterpoints (10 percent), a report on plagiarism vs. fair use in a digital world (15 percent), some quizzes, and class participation (10 percent). The course grade will be determined as follows: 93 and above, A; 91-92, A-; 89-90, B+; 84-88, B; 82-83, B-; 80-81, C+; 74-79, C; 72-73, C-; 70-71, D+; 65-69, D; 63-64, D-; 62 and below, F.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

Clifford G. Christians, Mark Fackler, Kathy Brittain Richardson, Peggy J. Kreshel and Robert H. Woods Jr., *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*, Ninth Edition, Allyn and Bacon, 2012.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Sept. 6 Syllabus review
What is ethics?
Ethical issues in the news
Assignment: "Your Greatest Ethical Dilemma"
(Due next class for discussion, and turn in)
Assignment: Read Introduction in textbook
- Sept. 11, 13 Discuss "Your Greatest Ethical Dilemma"
Approaches to studying media ethics
What is the right answer? Is there one?
Philosophical foundations/guiding principles
Analyzing issues: A methodology
Rating your values
Readings: Cases 1-3, 5-8
- Sept. 18, 20 Pressures on journalists
Monopoly and the impact on the media
Telling the truth, levels of truth
Reliable and valid sources of information
Assignment: Report on plagiarism vs. fair use in a digital world
Readings: Cases 9-15
- Sept. 25, 27 Use of deception; stolen information
Monitoring the watchdogs; codes of ethics
Conflicts of interest
Social responsibility
Assignment: Themes, teams for group debates/
points-counterpoints
Readings: Cases 18, 20, 21, 61, 73, 77
- Oct. 2, 4 Invasion of privacy
Censorship
Public trust in the media
Readings: Cases 22, 64-65, 67, 68
- Oct. 9, 11 Photojournalism, manipulating photographs
Violence, profits in entertainment
Assignment: Prepare for Exam I
- Oct. 16, 18 **Group debates begin**
Exam I: Covers Introduction in the textbook,
cases assigned, handouts/discussions to date

- Oct. 23, 25 **Group debates continue**
 Readings: Cases 43-48, 50-51
- Oct. 30,
 Nov. 1 **Finish any group debates**
 Begin discussion of persuasion and PR
 Do news and public relations get blurred?
 Organizations and telling the truth
 Readings: Cases 52, 54, 55, 56-59
- Nov. 6, 8 Continue discussion of PR ethics
 When loyalties are in conflict
 Social responsibility in public messages
 Readings: Cases 23-26
- Nov. 13, 15 Begin discussion of advertising ethics
 Life in a commercialized world
 Readings: Cases 27-29, 31, 32
- Nov. 20 Setting the image agenda
 Readings: Cases 34-37
- Nov. 27, 29 The image-makers
 Readings: Cases 38-42
- Dec. 4, 6 **Report on plagiarism vs. fair use due**
 Targeting audiences in a diverse society
 Media concerns of advertising influence
 Advertising ethics
 Assignment: Prepare for Exam II
- Dec. 11, 13 **Exam II:** Covers discussions, class handouts,
 and cases assigned since the first exam