



# UNC

## SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

### MEJO 141-005: Media Ethics Spring 2018

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**Course Meets:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8 – 9:15 a.m. in Rm. 143

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:15 – 11 a.m. or by appointment **\*\*email to arrange\*\***

#### **I. Course Description:**

We are going to look at the relationships of ethics, ethical dilemmas, and ethical practices within a variety of media professions including journalism, visual communication, public relations, and advertising. We will talk about ethical dilemmas that have confronted professionals in print, in broadcast, online, on social media, and in person. This class explores – both in class discussions and in written assignments – what constitutes ethical practices, what interferes with ethical practices, and what emerging ethical issues may challenge you as the future leaders of the media and journalism fields. There are no prerequisites for this course. This course is required for MEJO majors, and it meets a requirement for a minor in social and economic justice.

#### **II. Course Materials and Communication:**

**Textbook:** *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases (8th edition)* by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins.

The textbook will be supplemented by online readings that are posted to Sakai. All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to ensure that you are ready to discuss, ask questions, offer opinions, and interact with one another.

Sakai and email will be used to make announcements and distribute course material (readings, slides, handouts, assignment guidelines, etc.). **Emails will be sent only to your UNC email account.** It is your responsibility to keep up with information, instructions, and/or assignments from class, including those not listed in this syllabus.

Email is the best way to reach me. I will respond to emails within 24 hours. Please save questions regarding lengthy answers for in-person meetings.

#### **III. Course Objectives and Basic Guidelines**

**Course objectives:** The purpose of this class is to help you make ethical decisions within your profession in an organized way. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations;
- Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discussing communication topics found in trade journals and other media;
- Compare ethical standards of mass communication professions and examine how similarities and differences help or hinder their professional relationships;
- Develop, defend, and apply your own set of guidelines to tackle ethical situations.

**Basic guidelines:**

- Please be on time – it’s a matter of professionalism, responsibility, and mutual respect (all major themes within this course). **Class starts promptly at 8 a.m.**
- Be respectful – we need to hear what everyone has to say. Participation and discussion are keys to this course. We all may not agree on certain issues, but I do request that you be respectful in your disagreement.
- Communication is key – Many misunderstandings, issues, problems, or situations can be solved by communication. If I don’t know there is a problem, I can’t help to solve it. In essence, please come talk to me when you have concerns about the class or anything else that you think I can help with.

**Professional curiosity:**

This is a real-world class in which we are going to examine the challenges and dilemmas of today’s media professions. Curiosity – quite simply asking questions – is one of the foundations and driving tenants of our industries. Please stay current with what is going on in the world and in your profession. Take some time each week to check out the news in papers, magazines, TV, and online. Find out what ethical issues face professionals in your field by taking a look at the trade journals available in the Park Library (second floor of Carroll Hall) or online. If you see something interesting, I encourage you to bring it to class or post it on Sakai.

**About the content:**

This course may at times include topics, materials, and discussions that can be disturbing or distressing. It is difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate all the directions our conversations may take. If you find it necessary to step out of the classroom, you may do so without penalty. However, you still are responsible for any material covered during time that you miss, and should make arrangements to get notes from a classmate. I will be happy to meet with you if you have concerns. Please also remember that the university provides a number of resources and services to help you cope with any difficult challenges you face while part of the Carolina community and beyond through Counseling and Psychological Services (aka CAPS): <https://studentaffairs.unc.edu/about-us/departments/counseling-and-psychological-services>

**IV. Assignments & Evaluation**

Your grade is based on a mix of homework, in-class assignments, individual and group work, and exams. The assignments in this course will be graded using a points system that adds up to 1,000 points. The following is the grading breakdown:

Homework Assignments	150
In-class Assignments	100
Ethics in the News	100
Quizzes	100
Research Participation	50
Exam 1	100
Midterm Exam	150
Final Exam	200
Active Participation	50
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 1,000

**Please note that every grammar, spelling, and punctuation error results in -2 points. Every fact error (i.e. misspelled name, wrong statistics, etc.) results in -10 points.**

**Homework assignments (150 points; 15% of final grade):**

You will be given four homework assignments throughout the semester. These assignments will complement the lectures and encourage you to think deeper on the concepts we discuss in class. Individual homework assignment guidelines will be posted on Sakai.

**In-class assignments (100 points; 10% of final grade):**

Media professionals often work on a deadline. These in-class exercises are designed to provide you with real-time scenarios you may face as a practitioner. In addition, they will teach you how to deal with the pressure of working under a deadline. Please note there are no make-ups for in-class assignments aside from excused absences with prior notice given. Think of it this way—you would not be able to “make up” a press conference or missed news deadline, even with the best excuse in the world.

**Ethics in the news presentation (100 points; 10% of final grade):**

You will be assigned as pairs and asked to identify a recent (within the past year or so) news item dealing with media ethics. You will explain the item to the class and lead a short discussion (around 10-15 minutes). Each group member will receive the same grade for the assignment, unless a member does not show for the presentation or is demonstrating a clear lack of participation in the project. The schedule for the Ethics in the News presentations and a rubric for grading will be posted on Sakai.

The goal of this exercise is to clearly articulate modern ethical issue(s) society experiences, identify the tools we might use to consider those issues, and use that information to inform a proposed plan of action. You will be responsible for providing adequate valuable content to yield productive discussion in class (remember, your ability to affect the quality of class discussion is part of your grade). It may be easier to pick a topic of interest to you!

**Quizzes (100 points; 10% of final grade):**

Throughout the semester, you will be given five short quizzes (each worth 2% of your final grade) at the beginning of class to test whether you have done the day’s assigned reading. Quiz questions will be basic; you do not need to have studied the reading – you just need to read it. If you come late, you will have less time (or even no time) to do the quizzes. You may not come to class, take a quiz, and then leave. All in-class assignments require that you be present for the entire class period to count.

**Research participation requirement (50 points; 5% of final grade):**

Students are required to complete two hours of research over the course of the semester. There are two ways to fulfill this requirement. The first way is to participate in two hours of academic research studies in the School of Media and Journalism. Sign up online to participate in these studies – and, double-dipping is allowed if this requirement is present in another class. The second way to fulfill the research participation requirement is to write two two-page summaries and/or critiques of academic research articles from the *Journal of Media Ethics*. Each review counts for one hour of research participation, so you may combine participation in the studies with article reviews to fulfill the research requirement. You may summarize any article published in the past two years. Get some guidance here:

<http://guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo141>. **Your summaries are due no later than noon on Monday, April 23.**

**Exams (450 points; 45% of final grade):**

Three exams will test your understanding of the material covered in lectures, assigned readings, and class presentations. Exams will include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short-answer questions. The final exam will mostly include topics we have covered after Spring Break, but all course material is fair game. Exams may only be made up in the event of an actual medical emergency (with

proof from a doctor's note). Make-up exams will be given at a time and date that is convenient.

**Active participation (50 points; 5% of your final grade):**

Active participation means that you contribute meaningfully to class discussions, activities, and through Sakai. Our class is small, and it will be obvious who is and is not actively participating. How can you "actively participate?" Come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Ask meaningful questions. Respond to others' questions and comments thoughtfully. Initiate relevant discussions. Students who attend class but do not adequately contribute to discussion, activities, and group work are not considered active participants. Students who attend class, but spend that time texting, disrupting others, chatting, etc., are not considered participants at all.

**Grading Breakdown:**

A	900+ points
B+	870-899 points
B	800-869
C+	770-799 points
C	700-769
D+	679-699
D	600-669 points
F	599 points and below

**\*\*Grades will not be rounded up\*\***

**Quality work and guidelines:**

Your assignments will be evaluated primarily on the quality of your ideas, but also on how clearly and persuasively you present those ideas. Graded assignments (group and individual) will lose points for lack of professional presentation, including mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Proofread your work carefully; most importantly, think about your work.

**All submitted work must be double-spaced, stapled, and in Times New Roman, 12-point font, unless noted otherwise.**

**Late work policy:**

Missed deadlines are a costly error in the media industry. Therefore, **late submissions will not be accepted.** Excuses translate into loss of reputation and business in the profession. If you cannot attend class the day an assignment is due, you may email me the assignment **before class starts (i.e. no later than 7:59 a.m.)**.

**Extra credit opportunities:**

Opportunities for extra credit may arise throughout the semester. I view these as ways for you to improve your portfolio and increase your chances of landing a job after graduation. Should there be any other extra credit opportunities, I will inform you.

**A final (and important) note about grading and evaluation:**

You deserve an instructor who is approachable, fair, and accessible. I welcome questions and challenges, and you will never be penalized for your opinions, as long as they are considerate of others. I will work my hardest to make this course enjoyable and interesting. Please contact me sooner rather than later if you are having problems understanding any of the concepts covered. I am your resource for this class, so please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any trouble. I will do all I can to help you before a deadline; after a deadline has passed, I cannot retroactively help you improve that grade.

## **V. Additional Course Policies**

### **Attendance policy:**

It should not be understated how important attending class is to learning. As in the media profession, regular and punctual attendance is necessary for your success in this course. Responsibility for class attendance rests with you. You are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, stay for the entire class, and participate in class discussions. Students who are late to class will be noted as tardy; students more than 15 minutes late will be noted as absent. Three tardies count as one absence. If you miss class, you will not be allowed to make up in-class activities, and you will receive a zero for the class participation and any assignments that you may miss that day. If you have perfect attendance, your lowest quiz grade and in-class assignment will be replaced, and you will receive a five-point bonus on the final exam. If you miss one or two days, your lowest quiz grade will be replaced, and you will receive a two-point bonus on your exam. If you are knowingly going to miss class, please notify the instructor beforehand. If you miss class when an assignment is due, you may email the assignment **before class starts**. Excused absences include only those mandated by UNC. There are no exceptions to this policy, so do not ask for special consideration. Attendance also impacts your participation grade.

### **Phones and laptops:**

You are expected to assist in maintaining a working environment that is conducive to learning. In the case of in-class activities, you may use your laptop or smartphone; however, I will inform you when they will be needed. Phones should be silenced during class. If you are caught texting or browsing the internet during class, you will be counted absent for that day, and you will receive a zero for any in-class activity that day.

### **Plagiarism:**

This course requires original work, created at this time, for this purpose. This is, after all, an ethics course! Do not submit the same work to more than one class. Do not adapt work from another class for this class. Do not adapt someone else's work and submit it as your own. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will result in a zero for the assignment, and possibly an "F" for the course and further disciplinary action.

### **Honor code:**

All students in this course are expected to conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University honor system (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this university demands. All participants in this course are expected to complete their own work and there will be no leniency for cheating. Any participant in this course who has concerns about the Honor Code or the role it plays in this course are encouraged to meet with the instructor, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Students Charlie Tuggle, or a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

### **Diversity:**

The University's policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined at <http://policy.sites.unc.edu/files/2013/04/nondiscrim.pdf>. In summary, UNC does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Why is this important? We will explore it in this course.

### **Harassment:**

UNC does not tolerate harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, disability, or for any other reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act

(1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance with a harassment issue or problem, bring it to the attention of the instructor or The Office of the Dean of Students, dos@unc.edu or (919) 966-4042.

**Accommodation for special needs:**

I am more than happy to work with any student who, because of special needs, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements. Contact me as soon as possible to make arrangements. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Resources & Service Office website, call 919.962.8300, or use NC Relay 711. Students should present appropriate documents during my office hours. Students requiring special accommodation are strongly encouraged to speak with the instructor at the beginning of the semester in order to avoid any complications as class progresses.

**Protection of your privacy:**

Personally identifiable information, such as rank in class, personal conduct, grade point average, academic progress, etc., will not be released to non-authorized individuals without the written consent of the student. This includes parents. This is not just my policy – it is federal law.

**Professional values and competencies:**

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. The values and competencies in bold are most relevant for this course:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**Changes to the Syllabus:**

I reserve the right to amend the syllabus during the course, if necessary. Should any changes be made, students will be notified and will receive an updated version of the syllabus.

### Tentative Course Outline

Week	Days	Topics	Book Chapter/Assignments Due
1	Th- Jan. 11	Welcome! Class Overview	
2	T- Jan. 16	Case discussions: What were they thinking?	<i>*Individual bio &amp; syllabus agreement</i>
	Th- Jan. 18	Law/Ethics/Values/Manners	<i>*Plagiarism homework</i>
3	T- Jan. 23	Ethical Foundations	Ch. 1
	Th- Jan. 25		
4	T- Jan. 30	Moral Development	Ch. 11
	Th- Feb. 1		<i>*Philosophers and Ethical Decision Making</i>
5	T- Feb. 6	<b>***Exam 1***</b>	
	Th- Feb. 8	Professionalism and Codes	
6	T- Feb. 13	Decision-making Techniques	
	Th- Feb. 15	Decision-making Techniques (cont.)	
7	T- Feb. 20	Ethics & Sports Media	<i>Guest Speaker - Tommy Magelssen</i>
	Th- Feb. 22	Ethical Codes toward Decision-making	<i>*Ethics Code Scavenger Hunt</i>
8	T- Feb. 27	Diversity and Inclusion Issues	
	Th- March 1	Diversity (cont.) & Truth and Honesty	<i>*Diversity game</i>
9	T- March 6	Truth (cont.) & Midterm Review	
	Th- March 8	<b>***Midterm Exam***</b>	
10	T- March 13	<b>Spring Break</b>	
	Th- March 15		
11	T- March 20	<i>Go For Throttle Up</i>	<i>Guest Speaker - Richard Griffiths</i>
	Th- March 22	<i>Not So Finest Hours</i>	
12	T- March 27	Objectivity, Frames, etc.	
	Th- March 29	More Objectivity, Frames...	Ch. 9
13	T- April 3	Ads, Persuasion, etc.	
	Th- April 5	Persuasion (cont.)	Ch. 3
14	T- April 10	Loyalties	Ch. 4
	Th- April 12		Ch. 4 - Case 4-G (pg. 104-106)
15	T- April 17	Privacy	Ch. 5
	Th- April 19	Photo Challenges	Ch. 8
16	T- April 24	Media, Democracy, and Economics	Ch. 6 & Ch. 7
	Th- April 26	LDOC - Final Exam Review	
17	T- May 1	<b>***Final Exam at 8 a.m.***</b>	





**Syllabus Agreement Form - MEJO 141-005: Media Ethics**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read the syllabus in its entirety. Along with this, you agree to the information and the rules – and consequences – presented in the syllabus. If any questions should arise, please feel free to email the instructor at [trevor.bell@unc.edu](mailto:trevor.bell@unc.edu).

**\*Please return this by the second day of class.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_