

MEDIA ETHICS

(MEJO 141)

CONTACT

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Office Hours

Tuesday & Thursday 1pm - 2pm

Meets

Carroll Hall 283

Monday-Friday 9:45am - 11:15am

6/25/18 - 7/30/18

COURSE OVERVIEW

We're 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.

This class explores – both in class discussions and 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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this class is to help you make ethical decisions within your profession in an organized way. To that end, here are a few objectives. By semester's end, 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.

TO DO

Purchase a Textbook

The required text for this course is *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases* (8th edition) by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins. The text will be supplemented by additional readings.

[Sign up for a Slack Account](#)

We will use this site as a way to communicate inside and outside of class. You can also use it to aid in discussion with your classmates and as the primary way to ask me questions. This, along with Sakai will also be where you will turn in all your work and assignments. I will send you an email invitation to our Slack page.

details

ABOUT THE CONTENT

This course may at times include topics, materials, and discussions that could be disturbing or distressing to some people. 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 are responsible for any material covered during time that you miss, and you should make arrangements to get an update from a classmate. 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 \(CAPS\)](#).

BASIC GUIDELINES

- **Be respectful.** We need to hear what everyone has to say. Participation and discussion are keys to this course, and we may have some intense sessions. We don't all have to agree, but we do have to be respectful in our disagreement.
- **Be open minded.** This course isn't about what you naturally "think" or "feel" about things; it's about applying new knowledge gained in the class to address real-world ethical issues. Rely on informed reasoning and the professional guidelines you will learn. A great way to learn this skill is to take a stab at arguing against your initial reaction.
- **No phones, no social media, and no browsing.** You may use your laptops for taking notes, but there will be times when you will be asked to put your laptop away to facilitate discussions.
- **Communication is key.** Many misunderstandings, issues, problems, and unnecessary situations (crisis communications folks can come up with all sorts of names for it) can be solved by open communication. If I don't know there is a problem, I can't help to solve it. If you have an issue I need to be aware of, talk to me sooner rather than later. More time typically means more options from which to identify a solution.

ATTENDANCE

You are permitted 2 absences from class. If you are late to class by more than five minutes or leave more than 10 minutes early, you will be counted absent. Please do not notify the instructor of your reasons for your absences. For each class you miss after 2, your final grade will be lowered by three points. I strongly suggest that you save your absences for emergencies and sick days. Do not ask for an exception to the attendance policy when you actually come down with the flu. An absence on a due date does not justify a late assignment.

Your attendance will be posted on Sakai.

group assignment

Ethics in the News Presentation - 20%

You will be assigned to a group of 3-4 students and asked to identify a news item dealing with a mass media ethics-related event that has been in the news sometime during the previous two weeks. You'll explain the item to the class (15 minutes) and lead a short discussion (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 assignment consists of three components: the information you provide via Slack to educate your fellow students on your topic prior to class (news items, videos, links etc.), identify appropriate ethics codes to consider, your in-class presentation (using effective visuals such as a few PowerPoint slides); and your assistance guiding the discussion in class. You will be responsible for helping lead/manage the discussion in class, which is where we'll discuss the ways (and there will be multiple; remember, these decisions aren't black and white!) we might address the dilemma.

Some good places to find topics are [Poynter's Everyday Ethics Column](#) and the [iMedia Ethics website](#).

Please have your information posted to the appropriate Slack channel by at least 2pm TWO DAYS before your assigned presentation day. This gives your fellow students time to review the information you provide and to create their discussion points and questions. You should submit your in-class presentation (PowerPoint, handouts, etc.) to me through Slack before class on the day of your presentation.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate your project:

1. Is the topic timely (within the one-week time frame), and does it involve an issue of ethical concern to mass media professionals?
2. Do you clearly explain the situation? Do you clearly outline the ethical issue(s) the situation presents? Do you apply the appropriate ethics codes to analyze the situation and help inform your proposed response?
3. Do you effectively present your topic in class, using appropriate and effective visual aids (presentation slides, etc.)?
4. Do you effectively help guide class discussion, responding as appropriate to classmates' comments and questions?
5. Do you submit all your materials on time?

individual assignments

All written assignments should be turned into the appropriate Sakai assignment as Word documents with the exception of discussion points. Please double-space all written assignments using 12-point Times New Roman and 1" margins. The tone for all writing can be conversational but should also be professional. Late work will result in a full letter grade deduction. Assignments more than 24 hours late will not be accepted and a grade of 0 will be recorded.

Response Papers - 30%

You will be given three writing prompts and asked to respond. These will be found on Sakai along with a grading rubric. They will also be discussed in class and you are encouraged to review the material early to ask questions either in class or on Slack. The prompts will be available at least one week in advance of the due date. Each response should be no less than 450 words, but not more than 550 (approximately a page and a half double-spaced).

Opening Class: Intro to the Discussion - 20%

Each student will introduce a topic from the assigned reading once during the semester. The student will present (orally and in writing) a 1.5 to 2-page response paper (5 minutes). This assignment allows you to reflect on your assigned reading. It is an opportunity to “think out loud” about issues that interest you and that are connected to the reading. You may talk through a new idea arising from your reading, contemplate what confuses you, argue an inconsistency, defend an idea represented in the reading, offer an alternative view, elaborate/apply via a personal experience, etc. Turn in your written paper to the Sakai assignment.

Start the Conversation: Discussion Points - 10%

When not primarily responsible for introducing a topic or a news presentation during a class meeting, each student will present (orally and in writing) one assigned discussion point and/or question. Prepare one question or discussion point (open-ended rather than yes/no) to facilitate discussion of the assigned readings, topic, or news presentation. You will need to ask different questions than those that are already posted, so if someone has already posted your question or made your point, come up with something new. Post your discussion point to Slack.

Quizzes - 20%

Two quizzes will test your understanding of the material covered in lectures, assigned readings, and class presentations. The first quiz will test material up until that date, while the final quiz is comprehensive. Quizzes will include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short-answer questions to test your understanding of the material covered in lectures, in-class activities, assigned readings, and in-class presentations.

grading

This class is required for MEJO majors, and meets a requirement for a minor in social and economic justice. It also now meets the philosophical and moral reasoning (PH) requirement of General Education. That means, during the course of this semester, each student will complete at least 10 pages of writing. As you'll see in the week-to-week schedule, there are a few writing assignments that together meet this stipulation.

I follow the University's Grading Standards, as adopted by the Faculty Council:

"A" – Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The "A" grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.

"B" – Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "B" grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.

"C" – A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "C" grade states that, while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.

"D" – A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "D" grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the disciplines; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

"F" – For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The "F" grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant an adviser's questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

Grades will be posted on Sakai for all assignments.

ASSIGNMENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Ethics in the News Presentation | 20% |
| Three Response Papers | 30% |
| Opening Class Discussion | 20% |
| Start the Conversation | 10% |
| Quizzes | 20% |

GRADE SCALE

| Percentage | Grade |
|---------------|-------|
| 100-94% | A |
| 93-90% | A- |
| 89-87% | B+ |
| 86-84% | B |
| 83-80% | B- |
| 79-77% | C+ |
| 76-74% | C |
| 73-70% | C- |
| 69-67% | D+ |
| 66-60% | D |
| 59% and below | F |

some notes

VALUES & COMPETENCIES

The UNC Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of professional values and competencies students should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate. This course touches on a number of the values and competencies, with an emphasis on (1) demonstrating an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity; and (2) thinking critically, creatively and independently. Complete accreditation standards are available at [this link](#).

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability that may require reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have equal access to this course, you are encouraged to self-identify with either of the following offices, depending on your individual needs. Please notify the program at (919) 843-9471 as well.

Department of Accessibility Resources & Service
(919) 962-8300 accessibility.unc.edu

The Learning Center
(919) 962-7227 learningcenter.unc.edu

DIVERSITY

The University's policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined [here](#). 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.

HONOR CODE

All participants in this course are expected to complete their own work and there will be no leniency for cheating. Anyone 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.

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.

class schedule

| Day | Date | Topic | Read/Watch/Listen | Assignment |
|-----|------|---|---|--|
| M | 6/25 | Intro; What are ethics? | | In Class: Questionnaire - Who are you? |
| T | 6/26 | Moral philosophy | TBD | |
| W | 6/27 | Moral psychology & culture | Listen: On Being Podcast with Jonathan Haidt or Watch: Haidt's TED Talk | In Class: MFT Quiz |
| Th | 6/28 | Ethical decision making | Read: P&W Ch. 1 pp. 1-20 | |
| F | 6/29 | The ethics of informing | Listen: Public Interest & the Press or Read: P&W Ch. 5 pp. 108-121 | |
| M | 7/2 | News & journalism | Read: P&W Ch. 2 pp. 21-37 and Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics | |
| T | 7/3 | Holiday; No class. | | |
| W | 7/4 | Deception & loyalty | Read: P&W Ch. 4 pp. 81-91 and Case 4G p. 104 | |
| Th | 7/5 | The image | Read: P&W Ch. 8 pp. 187-199 | Response Paper #1 Due |
| F | 7/6 | Images & journalism | Read: P&W cases 4B, 8C, 8D, 8G, and 8H | |
| M | 7/9 | New & social media | Read: P&W Ch. 9 pp. 226-238 | |
| T | 7/10 | Algorithms & search engines | TBD | Quiz #1 |
| W | 7/11 | Disinformation, misinformation, & fake news | Listen: Moral Maze podcast on the morality of fake news | |
| Th | 7/12 | Politics & polarization | TBD | Group 1 presents |
| F | 7/13 | The ethics of persuasion | Read: P&W Ch. 3 pp. 51-64 | |
| M | 7/16 | Public relations | TBD | Response Paper #2 Due |
| T | 7/17 | Crisis communication | TBD | Group 2 presents |
| W | 7/18 | Advertising | TBD | |
| Th | 7/19 | Native advertising & product placement | TBD | Group 3 presents |
| F | 7/20 | Targeting the audience | TBD | Group 4 presents |
| M | 7/23 | The new frontier: AI, VR, facial recognition & big data | Listen: Moral Maze podcasts on Big Data or AI | |
| T | 7/24 | The influence of economics | TBD | Group 5 presents |
| W | 7/25 | Race, gender, & media | TBD | |
| Th | 7/26 | Entertainment media | Read: P&W Ch. 10 pp. 254-268 | Response Paper #3 Due |
| F | 7/27 | Reading Day; No class. | | |
| M | 7/30 | Final Exam 8am-11am | | Quiz #2 |