

Syllabus

MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDIA
AND JOURNALISM

Course Details	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-4:45 p.m. Carroll Hall, Room 33
Instructor	Deborah Dwyer ddwyer@live.unc.edu 423.994.2840
Office & Hours	Carroll Hall 367 Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30-3 p.m. and by appointment

Welcome to the fascinating and challenging world of media ethics!

We're here to learn about ethics in the mass media. Media professionals talk a lot about doing the right thing, but they're often criticized for ethical and moral shortcomings. In this class, we will discuss the ethical dilemmas that confront professionals in **print** and **broadcast journalism, visual communication** (photojournalism and graphic design), and **strategic communication** (PR, advertising, and other business communication). We will examine codes of ethics for various media professions and evaluate how these guidelines have and have not been applied in specific settings.

This class explores 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. In the end, you should be familiar with the tools needed to make professional ethical decisions in an organized and informed way.

Rather than a course that focuses solely on your retention of specific information, "learning" ethics means adding *critical thinking* and *applied reasoning* to your skills toolbox so you can use them to navigate an unlimited number of challenges you might face during your career.

You'll get out of this course what you put into it. Your success will depend upon your willingness to keep up with the readings, participate in class and on Sakai, and keep an open mind when dealing with issues and others' opinions. So come to class prepared and ready to participate in informed discussions!

Text/Readings

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 online readings. All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to ensure that you're ready to discuss, ask questions, offer opinions, disagree, argue, and share knowledge.

Syllabus

MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDIA
AND JOURNALISM

Prerequisites

None! This class is required for MEJO/JOMC majors, and it meets a requirement for a minor in social and economic justice. MEJO 141 also 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. Your cumulative assignments meet this stipulation.

Course Goals

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

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. Learn more about them here:

<http://bit.ly/2b2FoBB>. 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 below are most relevant for this course:

- 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 the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Think critically, creatively and independently

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

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

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):

<https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/counseling-andpsychological-services>.

Basic Guidelines

- Be on time. This is a basic issue of professionalism, responsibility, and mutual respect (all huge themes of this course). Getting dinged for violating this expectation is one of the best ways to ensure you learn the importance of this before entering the professional world. Seriously.
- Be respectful. We need to hear what everyone has to say. Participation and discussion are keys to this course, and we may we have some intense discussions. In other words, we don't all have to agree, but we do have to be respectful in our disagreement. Don't worry about pauses in conversation in here; it's more important to reason through your responses than being quick on the draw.
- 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 the real-world ethical issues we discuss. Try to keep your personal feelings in check and instead 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! (Hence the point about pauses to think above...)
- No phones, no social media, and no browsing. Please turn off the ringer and put away your phone before class begins. We're only in class 75 minutes at a time; give your electronics (and yourselves!) a break. You may use your laptops for taking notes only, but there will be times when you will be asked to put your laptop away to facilitate discussions. If I see an issue with the use of laptops, we will revisit the use of them during class time.
- 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. Knowing well in advance about the issue equates to more options from which to identify a solution.

Assignments & Course Requirements

Please note that late assignments are not accepted without my prior approval.

Attendance

You are permitted three absences from class without penalty. If you are late to

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

class by more than five minutes or leave more than 10 minutes early, you will be counted absent. You do not have to notify the instructor of your reasons for your absences, nor do you have to provide a doctor's note. For each class you miss after three, your final grade will be lowered by three points. For example, if your grade average is a B- (81) and you have four absences, your final grade will be a C+ (78). Please note: Chances are good that you will need all of your absences for sick days or other types of emergencies or opportunities. I suggest you save your absences for these purposes.

Participation

More than many other college courses, the success of this class depends in large part on the quality of class discussion. Quality discussion depends in large part on students coming to class prepared. Protect your participation grade! Here's how:

- **Starting the Conversation:** All students will be assigned at least one day to "Start the Conversation" (find your assigned day(s) on Sakai.; no trading dates with anyone else in the class without permission of the instructor). You'll be expected to write three good (yes/no does not count) questions about the assigned readings for that day in the "Start the Conversation" forum by 11 p.m. the day before your assigned class period. Please note that multiple people will be assigned to each day, so you will need to ask different questions than those that are already posted. If someone has already posted your question, come up with something else. Failure to post three discussion questions or posting duplicate questions will result in three points deducted from your final participation grade for each date missed.
- **Pay attention.** Good classroom discussion depends on good listening. If you are clearly not paying attention during the in-class presentations or class discussion, your final participation grade will reflect that. Ways to demonstrate you aren't engaged are talking to your neighbor while someone else is speaking to the class, reading or viewing material not related to the class discussion or activity, sleeping in class, having a computer open during Ethics in the News presentations, or generally being disruptive in a way that prohibits a good learning environment. You will be notified if I see behavior that's threatening your participation grade to be given a chance to rectify it before your grade suffers.
- **Fully engage in discussion.** I will be keeping track of who speaks in class throughout the semester. This is a big class and so it is difficult to get to everyone who would like to speak in each class period, but it is expected we hear from as many voices as possible during our sessions. You can also meet your participation requirement by posting in our forum on Sakai. The post can be as short as 50 words, but it must directly address something brought up during the class discussion. Failure to complete one of these two activities each week will result in a per-instance 3-point deduction to your participation grade. True statement: Those who engage in class and are used to verbally talking through (or typing about) ethical issues will have more practice that prepares you for tests.

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

In-class Assignments

Periodically, you will be given a short quiz at the beginning of class to test whether you have done the day's assigned reading. These tasks will be basic; you do not need to have studied the reading – you just need have read it. Quizzes will always be given during the first five minutes of class. If you come late, you will have less/no time to take the quiz. If you are counted absent for any class period, you will also receive a zero on any missed in-class activities. All in-class assignments require that you be present for the entire class period to count. There are no make-up opportunities for these assignments.

Writing Exercises

Throughout the semester, you will be given two writing prompts. Details will be found on Sakai along with a grading rubric. These assignments will be discussed in class, and you are encouraged to review the material early to ask questions either in class or in the forums. The writing can be conversational, but professional. Each should be no fewer than 3 and no more than 5 double-spaced pages. Late papers will not be accepted.

Ethics in the News Project (due dates on Sakai)

You will be assigned to a group of 3-4 students to investigate a media ethics item from current news. You'll present the item to the class, provide an analysis of the issue using knowledge and tools (i.e. codes of ethics) from the class, create a short in-class presentation, and lead class discussion. This is a good way to begin "flexing" your critical thinking and applied reasoning skills in response to real-world challenges faced by mass media professionals.

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 are posted on the Sakai site.

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 do this in three steps:

1. Educate your fellow students on a timely appropriate news topic (ethical challenge faced by the media) by a) briefly overviewing the issue and b) the ethics challenges it presents, c) applying the appropriate ethics codes to consider how to address the situation, d) use your analysis to propose the "best" way to proceed, and e) pose potential discussion questions for class
2. Complete an in-class presentation (5-7 minutes) using the framework above and visuals such as PowerPoint slides
3. Engage your fellow students in a short discussion session, providing additional prompts to spark discussion as necessary and focusing the conversation on the issue's key ethical questions, ethical analysis, and potential solutions.

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

One thing to remember: there is virtually never “THE RIGHT” decision when it comes to ethics; these issues challenge us because of their nebulous nature and the lack of considerations being “black and white.” Don’t waste time thinking there is an expectation about your specific proposed solution; the only expectation is that it be logical and formed rationally by the knowledge you’ve gained in class.

Your team will create a discussion thread in the Ethics in the News forum on Sakai (put the team’s last names in the subject line and your presentation date). Provide a few link/attachments for class members to familiarize themselves with the issue (news items, videos, etc.). Don't go overboard; this is just one reading component of that day’s class. 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).

Some good places to find Ethics in the News topics are Poynter's Everyday Ethics Column at <http://www.poynter.org/tag/everyday-ethics/> and the iMedia Ethics website at <http://www.imediaethics.org/>. I'll post a previous Ethics in the News student post and presentation in the Resources folder on Sakai.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate your project:

1. Is the topic timely (within two-weeks of your presentation), and does it involve an issue of ethical concern to mass media professionals?
2. On Sakai, do you clearly explain the situation? Do you outline the ethical issue(s) the situation presents? Do you analyze the situation using ethical decision-making tools? Do you provide an informed proposed solution to the problem? Do you consider consequences (or pros/cons) of that solution?
3. Do you effectively present your project to the class, using appropriate and effective visual aids (presentation slides, etc.)?
4. Do you effectively lead class discussion, responding as appropriate to classmates' comments and questions?
5. Do you submit your Sakai post and class presentation by the deadline?

Your information must be posted on the Sakai discussion board by Sunday at 6 p.m. for Tuesday presentations and Tuesday at 6 p.m. for Thursday presentations. This gives your fellow students time to review the information you provide and consider your discussion questions. Your in-class presentation (PowerPoint, handouts, etc.) is due to me through the Assignment section on Sakai before class begins on the day of your presentation.

Midterm and Final Exams

Two 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/brief essay questions. The final exam will test

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

your knowledge of the material from the entire semester. 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 to both the instructor and student. Please note that you will need to bring your laptop to class for the exams. More details about the exam will be provided in class.

Research Participation Requirement

Students in MEJO 141-004 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. You will receive emails about these opportunities; sign up online to participate. 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 either of the last two issues of 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 not "double dip" on this assignment, meaning that you may not turn in a paper for this class and any other. The summary should include your personal and frank reaction to the article and can be written in any tone that you chose. Get some guidance here:

<http://guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo141>. Your summaries are due no later than noon on Tuesday, Nov. 27. Early papers are cheerfully accepted!

Final Grade Calculation

• Final exam	25%	<u>Grading Scale</u> A = 93 - 100
• Writing Exercises	20%	A- = 90 - 92.9
• Ethics in the News presentation	15%	B+ = 87 - 89.9
• Midterm exam	15%	B = 83 - 86.9
• Participation (starting the conversation, in class and/or on Sakai)	15%	B- = 80 - 82.9
• Quizzes	5%	C+ = 77 - 79.9
• Research participation	5%	C = 73 - 76.9
		C- = 70 - 72.9
		D+ = 67 - 69.9
		D = 60 - 66.9
		F = <60

In order to earn a letter grade, you must fully earn that percentage. Grades are not rounded up or down. So, to receive a final course grade of A-, you must earn at least a 90 percent. A final average of 89.7 is a B+.

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

Although grades are not negotiable, I will give consideration if a legitimate concern arises about an assignment grade. However, you must contact me promptly. If you have questions about or dispute a particular grade, this needs to be taken care of within a week of receiving that grade.

I follow the University's Grading Standards adopted by the Faculty Council. *More specifics from me are in italics.*

- 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. *Clear and original thinking, thorough analysis, logical assertions supported by significant amounts of evidence, clear writing that is concise and grammatically correct, and strong organization. Very strong class participation.*
- 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. *Clear and original thinking, relatively thorough analysis, logical assertions supported by some amount of evidence, clear writing with very few grammatical errors, and good organization. Strong class participation.*
- 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. *One or two elements of the assignment may be weak or missing, some writing errors, some weakness in organization, and relatively little evidence for assertions. Adequate class participation.*
- 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. *Several elements of the assignment are weak or missing, poor writing, poor organization, lack of evidence for assertions. Low class participation.*
- 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. *Most or all of the required elements are missing, the assignment is turned in late, and writing is so bad that it's difficult to understand. Very low or no class participation.*

Syllabus

MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018



UNC
SCHOOL OF MEDIA
AND JOURNALISM

Sakai Course Site

Course information, including this syllabus, and other resources are available via Sakai. As a student registered in MEJO 141-004, you have automatic access to this site and are expected to use it fully for this class. I'll provide a tour of the basics of the resources on the site in class.

Forums: This will be the place to post your Starting the Conversation and Class Response posts. You are encouraged to continue and/or spark class discussion at any time, even if it's a topic area that we've already covered. You may come up with some great ideas outside of class or read something you think would be valuable to discuss. Post opinions, brainstorm, afterthoughts or new ideas, links to articles you have read, pose questions, or announcements. All postings must adhere to University policies and standards. Please be respectful of all opinions, whether you agree with them or not.

Resources: PowerPoints and supplemental readings are posted in this section. Many students find it advantageous to access PowerPoints prior to class so in-class participation is easier. My PowerPoints are merely outlines for discussion. I do not provide all the detail; that is what note taking is for. Taking notes in the notes section of the PowerPoint is a great way to keep all your content for tests in one place.

Assignments: Details about your assignments are posted in this section. This is where you submit your assignments as well.

Gradebook and Attendance: You can see your grades and your attendance record under these sections at any time.

Honor Code

All participants in this course are expected to conduct themselves within the guidelines of the [University Honor System](#). All academic work should be completed 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. 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.

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.

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

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.

Accreditation

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 <https://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML#std2>.

Individual Accommodations

If you require individual accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. For more information, visit the Learning Center website at <http://learningcenter.unc.edu/ldadhd-services/> or call (919) 962-3782.

Course Schedule

(Subject to change as needed)

Date	Topic
Aug. 21 & 23	Welcome! Class Overview What are Ethics?
Aug. 28 & 30	The Philosophers Ethical Principles
Sept 4 & 6	Guest Speaker Journalism Ethics & Professional Codes
Sept. 11 & 13	Journalism Ethics & Professional Codes (continued) Sensitive Subjects: Talking About Sex, Race, & Trauma
Sept. 18 & 20	Digital Media and Big Data Writing Assignment #1 Due
Oct. 2 & 4	Privacy Midterm Review
Oct. 9 & 11	Midterm Vis Comm

Syllabus



MEJO 141.004 | Media Ethics | Fall 2018

Oct. 16	Vis Comm Oct. 18 – No class (Fall Break)
Oct. 23 & 25	Partisanship & Fake News
Oct. 30 and Nov. 1	Advertising & PR
Nov. 6 & 8	Nobody Speak
Nov. 13 & 15	Advertising & PR
Nov. 20	Comparing the Codes Nov. 22 – No class (Thanksgiving break)
Nov. 27 & 29	Catch-up week Writing Assignment #2 Due
Dec. 4	Final Review Dec. 6 (Reading Day – no class)
Dec. 13, 4 p.m.	Final Exam