

# Media Ethics - MEJO 141.1

**Classroom:** Carroll 33  
**Time:** T/Th 8-9:15 am

**Instructor:** Michele Meyer  
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**Office hours:** By appointment

## Welcome to Media Ethics!

We're gathered here today to discuss the ethical dilemmas facing professionals in several fields of mass media including (but not limited to): journalism, visual communication, advertising, and public relations. We will discuss the philosophical foundations of ethics, professional codes of ethics, and new ethical concerns that are emerging as technology redefines the ways in which we interact with the world around us.

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## 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.

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## Prerequisites

All are welcome! 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. As you'll see in the week-to-week schedule, there are a few writing assignments that together meet this stipulation.

## Things to Do

- Buy the book: *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases* (9th edition) by Philip Patterson & Lee Wilkins
    - There will be readings from this book as well as additional articles posted online
  - [Sign up for Slack](#)
    - 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. Slack is regularly used in the workplace so it is to your benefit to familiarize yourself with it now.
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## Attendance & Participation (15%)

This is primarily a discussion-based class. Therefore, it is imperative that you are here and that you are engaged with the content. I understand that not everyone likes talking in class (I was that person, once) so you have the option to contribute to the discussion *either* during class time *or* on Slack **before class**.

You are allotted 3 absences from class. This encompasses **all scenarios** in which you may not be here. There is no need to contact me and let me know why you won't be in class that day. I strongly suggest that you save your absences for emergencies and sick days, but I'm not here to judge. I recognize that mental health days are just as important as physical sick days. But seriously, save yourself some time. Do not ask for an exception to the attendance policy when you actually come down with the flu - and I *really* don't want you coming into class when you have the flu.

Any absences beyond the allotted three will result in 5 points off from your final grade. An absence on a due date does not justify a late assignment.

## Keep Your Eyes Open

This is a real-world class in which we're going to examine the challenges and dilemmas of today's media and communication professions. Please keep up with what's going on in the world and in your profession. Take some time each week to check out the news in papers, magazines, TV and/or 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. See something interesting? Bring it to class or post it on Slack! Operating in the professional world involves keeping up with what is going on in the world around you. This is good practice and it comes in handy.

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## Classroom Policies

**Contacting me** Your best bet is to reach out to me on Slack. I'm keeping my class communications over there so you don't get lost in the dozens of emails I get all day long. Also, I make no guarantees that I will respond in a timely manner to any emails sent after 9pm or on weekends. Keep this in mind - you don't want to leave things until the last minute and then not be able to get a hold of me.

**Handing in assignments** Submit assignments on Sakai. If it's a group project, only one person needs to hand it in, but make sure everyone's name is on it. Please hand it in as a Word document so I can easily make comments. Papers should be Times New Roman, 12-point font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins. There is no need to add a title page. Late papers will have 5 points deducted per day.

**Office hours** I have found in the past that people generally do not utilize office hours outside of paper/test times, so I am not holding regular times. I'm around a lot, so just reach out to me and schedule something if you want to talk.

**Classroom etiquette** This is a discussion-based class. It needs to be a space where everyone is comfortable speaking up. This is not as easy as it seems, but there are a few things we can do to make it more attainable:

1. **Don't judge.** We all come from different backgrounds and have different perspectives. Many of us may be encountering these ideas for the first time. Be patient and give yourself and others space to grow and learn.
2. **Challenge your own perspectives.** As college students, now is the time to question your preconceived notions and refine your beliefs. Are you positive that you stand by your values 100%? That's great! You're ahead of the curve. Now, work to understand the other side so you can show them empathy and learn how to work together. Or, you can just learn how to crush all of their subpar arguments.
3. **Listen before you speak.** Don't just sit there waiting to say what you want to say. I find it helps to write down my point so I can be sure I don't forget while I'm listening to others.

I'll do my best to facilitate conversation, challenge you, and intervene when necessary, but I really want you to be running the show. That said, there a few things I won't stand for, including discriminatory and derogatory comments.

**Can I have breakfast during class?** For now, yes. Don't be disruptive. And try not to eat things that might annoy the person sitting next to you.

## A Note on 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).

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## Assignments & Quizzes

### 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.) and to 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 two-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?

### 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).

### Quizzes - 10%

Each day, we'll do a short (one question) "quiz" on the homework. This will be a very easy, obvious question that is designed to 1) take attendance and 2) encourage you to do the reading. These will *not* be difficult and I will drop the lowest three, so you are not penalized for missing class.

### Midterm and Final - 20%

These tests will be designed to test your ability to apply the knowledge you've gained throughout the semester. It is not just a reflection of your ability to memorize the raw facts from the class. The final is NOT cumulative.

### Research Participation - 5%

You are expected to engage with academic research two times this semester. This can be done in three different ways:

- Option 1: Participate in two academic research studies in the School of Media and Journalism. Participating in studies is a valuable way for you to receive first-hand experience with media and communication research. You will be able to sign up online to participate in these studies – and, double-dipping is allowed if you are taking another class that requires research participation!
- Option 2: Write article assessments – due Dec 4, noon. Each assessment counts for 1 hour of research participation. (a) write assessment (two pages each) of a study topic in Journalist's Resource with ethical ramifications; and/or (b) write two-page summary/critique of an academic research article no older than 2 years. Among the journals to consult: *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Media Ethics*, *Mass Communication and Society*, *Journal of Public*

*Relations Research, Public Relations Review, and Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media.*

- Option 3: Combo! 1 research study and 1 assessment

And Now it's Time for a (Grading) Breakdown

Class/online participation	15%
Ethics in news	20%
Response papers (3 total)	30%
Quizzes	10%
Midterm and Final	20%
Research	5%

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

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 they 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.

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### 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; (2) thinking critically, creatively and independently; (3) demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications; and (4) demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

Complete accreditation standards are available at this [link](#).

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### 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](http://accessibility.unc.edu)

The Learning Center  
(919) 962-7227 [learningcenter.unc.edu](http://learningcenter.unc.edu)

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### 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](mailto:dos@unc.edu) or (919) 966-4042.

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## Class Schedule

Please note that additional readings will be posted online throughout the semester. Also, depending on possible guest lectures, the syllabus may be subject to change.

Dates	Topic	Assignment (due that day)
1/10	Welcome! Who are you?	
1/15	Guest speaker: Richard Griffiths	Personal survey due, join



		Slack
1/17	Ethical foundations	Ch 1
1/22	Telling the truth	Ch 2
1/24	Decision-making techniques	Pgs 70-75, 104-107
1/29	Decision-making techniques continued	
1/31	Moral development	Ch 11
2/5	Moral development continued	
2/7	Professionalism & codes	Readings on Sakai
2/12	Professionalism & codes continued	
2/14	Objectivity	Readings on Sakai
2/19	Diversity & inclusion - Standpoint theory	Readings on Sakai
2/21	Diversity & inclusion continued	
2/26	Sensitive topics	Readings on Sakai
2/28	Sensitive topics continued	
3/5	Midterm Review	
3/7	Midterm	
3/12-3/14	No class - Spring Break!	
3/19	Guest Speaker: Richard Griffiths	
3/21	Persuasion	Ch 3
3/26	Persuasion continued	
3/28	Photo and visual issues	Ch 8
4/2	Photo and visual issues continued	
4/4	Loyalties	Ch 4
4/9	Democracy	Ch 6

4/11	Democracy continued	
4/16	Economics	Ch 7
4/18	Privacy	Ch 5
4/23	Ethics in entertainment	Ch 10
4/25	Final Review	
4/30	Final - 8 am	