



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

## MEJO 141.5 - Media Ethics FALL SEMESTER 2019



**Instructor:** Tegan Bratcher  
[teganrae@live.unc.edu](mailto:teganrae@live.unc.edu)

**Class place/time:** Carroll 143, Tues & Thurs  
3:30-4:45 p.m.

**Office Hours:** Carroll 368 (3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Carroll)  
Tues/Thurs 1:30-3:15 (by [appointment](#))

### Why are we here?

In this class we are going to examine relationships of professional ethics, ethical dilemmas, and ethical practices within a variety of media professions – print, broadcast, and online journalism; various visual communications approaches for news and business; public relations; advertising; and even hybrids. This class permits all students opportunities to explore – both in class discussions and in written assignments – what constitutes professional ethical practices, what interferes with acting ethically, and what emerging ethical issues may challenge you as the newest generation of professional communicators.

#### What are our goals?

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 to resolve ethical dilemmas;
- Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discussing communication topics found in trade journals and other media;
- Compare ethical codes and standards of our 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.
- Develop and enhance professional skills like classroom and email etiquette, public speaking and team work.

#### Professional Courtesy

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. In addition to staying current, it is imperative we all remain respectful of each other and differing perspectives or opinions. While we all may not agree on issues presented in class, we should respect each other's right to speak in class.

### **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 plan 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>

## Reading Material

### **This book is required for this class**

Patterson, P, Wilkins L., Painter, C. (2019). *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases 9th Ed.*  
London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

There will also be supplemental readings for some weeks. Any readings outside of the required text will be in the Resources folder on 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](#).

## When are we here?

### **Attendance and Participation:**

Class is in session every Tuesday and Thursday at 3:30pm until 4:45pm, unless otherwise stated by the course syllabus. Attendance is necessary for creating a thriving class environment with good discussion and perspective.

Attendance sign-in sheets will be posted in the classroom and it is the students responsibility to sign themselves in by the end of class in order to be marked present for class. Students are allowed to miss 3 class period without it interfering with their grade. Students should notify the instructor when they will be absent from class via email.

Please Note: When absent, you are still responsible for learning the material covered that day or any assignments due. In class assignments **cannot** be made up if you are absent from class that day.

For each class you miss after the given 3 excused absences, your final grade will be lowered by 3 points. For example, if your final grade is a 81 (B-) and you've missed four classes during the semester, a deduction of 3 points would make your final grade a 78 (C+).



Additionally, attendance and participation should not be viewed as synonymous. While just showing up to class is a vital part of learning, being an active participant in class is also pivotal for ultimate success in the class. Though this is a big class we can still make discussions lively and entertaining by contributing our thoughts. Rather than just hearing from the same few people every week, I would like to hear the range of diverse opinions in class.

As one of our class goals is to develop and/or enhance professional skills like public speaking, I understand that not everyone possesses the personality to speak in front of large groups of people. With this being said, the discussion posts are a great way to keep your participation up both in and out of class.

Not feeling well and don't want to talk during class? In a bad mood? Don't feel comfortable sharing your *unpopular opinion*? (hopefully that's never the case) Missed class? All of these are good reasons to post some thoughts on the discussion board without having to speak - while still being an active member of our class.

Consider the following rubric for participation:

<b>A (9-10)</b> Consistently participates in class/online twice a week. Has thought-provoking ideas, asks questions. On time, no absences.	<b>B (7-8)</b> Participates in class/online twice a week consistently throughout the semester. Good ideas, asks questions. On time, no absences.	<b>C (5-6)</b> Participates in class/online from time to time. Mostly prefers to lurk. Pretty good input but is not contributing consistently. Attends class.	<b>D/F (4 or less)</b> Barely says anything at all, both in class and online. Mostly lurks, even if there is good attendance. Late to classes. A lot of absences.
---	---	--	--

## Staying Current

This class uses the reading material and assignments to make sense of real world issues. It is imperative that students are actively engaged in the day’s news/events. One app I like is Flipboard, or [The Skimm](#) (website). You can also find ethical issues that professionals in your field face 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 up in class or post the link to Sakai!

## Assignments | Deadlines | Grades

### 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 900 points. The following is the grading breakdown:

- Homework Assignments 150
- In-class Assignments 150
- Ethics in the News 100
- Quizzes 20
- Research Participation 50
- Midterm Exam 150
- Final Exam 200
- Active Participation 80
- Total 900**

*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 five 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 (150 points; 15% 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. Groups will present on Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, as designated by the weekly course schedule below. 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 (20 points; 2% of final grade): There will be two quizzes given randomly during the semester. Both quizzes will be 10 points, for a total of 20 points for the semester. Quizzes will come largely from the text so students should keep up with the readings.

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 3:30pm Tuesday, November 26<sup>th</sup>.**

Exams (350 points; 45% of final grade): Two exams will test your understanding of the material covered in lectures, assigned readings, and class presentations. Exams can include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short-answer questions. The final exam will mostly include topics we have covered after the midterm, 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 (80 points; 8% of your final grade): Active participation means that you contribute meaningfully to class discussions, activities, and through Sakai. Our class is relatively 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.

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 3:30 p.m.). Any negotiations regarding late work should be worked out between you and I at least 24 hours prior to the assignment being due.

\*Extra credit opportunities: Opportunities for extra credit may arise throughout the semester. Should there be any 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.

## Important Info

### Special Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

### Honor Code

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

### Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

### Diversity and Inclusion

The School of Media and Journalism adopted [diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements](#) in spring 2016 with accompanying goals. It complements the University policy on [Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination](#). In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and 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.

### 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 my attention or The Office of the Dean of Students, [dos@unc.edu](mailto:dos@unc.edu) or 919/966-4042.

### ACEJMC Professional values and competencies

The School of Media and Journalism’s accrediting body outlines 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. No single course could possibly give you all 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.

### Fall 2019 Tentative Course Outline

Week	Date	Topics	Readings/Assignments Due
1	Aug 20	Welcome! Course overview	
	Aug 22	Case Study What Were They Thinking?	<i>Individual bios and syllabus agreement due</i>
2	Aug 27	Law/Ethics/Values/Manners	
	Aug 29	Ethical Foundations	<i>Ch. 1, Plagiarism exercise due</i>
3	Sept 3	Ethical Foundations	
	Sept 5	Moral Development	<i>Ch. 11, Philosophers &amp; Ethical Decision making due</i>
4	Sept 10	Moral Development	
	Sept 12	Professionalism and Codes	

5	Sept 17	Decision-making Techniques	
	Sept 19		
6	Sept 24	Ethics & Sports Media	Guest Speaker: Tommy Magelssen
	Sept 26	Ethics in Photo Journalism	Guest Speaker: Johnny Andrews
7	Oct 1	Ethical Codes towards decision-making	<i>Ethics Code Scavenger Hunt due</i>
	Oct 3	Diversity & Inclusion	<i>Diversity game due</i>
8	Oct 8	Diversity, Truth & Honesty	
	Oct 10	Truth & Honest (cont.) & Midterm Review	
9	Oct 15	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
	Oct 17	Fall Break No Classes	
10	Oct 22	<i>Ethics in the News Presentations</i>	
	Oct 24	<i>Ethics in the News Presentations</i>	
11	Oct 29	Objectivity, Frames, etc.	
	Oct 31	More objectivity, frames	Ch 9
12	Nov 5	Ads, Persuasion, etc.	
	Nov 7	Persuasion (cont)	Ch 3
13	Nov 12	Loyalties	Ch 4
	Nov 14		Ch 4, Case 4-G (pgs 127-131)
14	Nov 19	Privacy	Ch 5
	Nov 21	Photo Challenges	Ch 8
15	Nov 26	Media, Democracy & Economics	Ch 6, Ch 7, <i>Required research hours due**</i>
	Nov 28	Thanksgiving Recess – No classes	
16	Dec 3	Last Day of Class – Exam Review	
	Dec 5	Reading Day – No classes	
17	Dec 12	<b>Final Exam @ 4pm in Carroll 143</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 [teganrae@live.unc.edu](mailto:teganrae@live.unc.edu)

\*Please return this by the second day of class, August 22, 2019.

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