***MEJO 141.6 – Media Ethics: Spring 2020***

**Classroom:** Carroll 33

**Time:** MW 8-9:15 am

**Instructor:** Michael McElroy

**Office:** Faculty lounge

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**Office Hours:** By appointment

C**ourse Overview**: We’re going to explore how media professions and publications establish ethical guidelines and how difficult it can sometimes be to follow them. We will seek to define ethics and learn whether they are innate, learned or some combination of both, and we will establish their historical roots and learn if ancient concepts can be applied to modern day dilemmas. We may even seek to answer some core questions, like ‘Why are we here and does any of it matter’? We will explore how ethics play throughout the communications approach in journalism; public relations; and the advertising industry. We will also discuss what emerging ethical issues may challenge the newest generation of professional communicators. That’s you.

**Course Objectives**: You will learn to draw on the experience and musings of others to make organized ethical decisions within your profession. By semester’s end, you should also be able to:

å integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations;

å critically analyze current media practices through reading and discussing

communication topics found in trade journals and other media;

å compare ethical standards of mass communication professions and examine how

similarities and differences help or hinder their professional relationships;

å develop, defend, and apply your own set of guidelines in ethical challenges.

**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://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps](http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/program/principles.shtml#vals&comps). 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:

* **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;**
* **Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;**
* **Think critically, creatively and independently;**
* Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
* Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, 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;
* Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
* Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
* Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
* Critically evaluate your own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
* Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

## *Prerequisites:* None.This class is required for MEJO majors, and it meets a requirement for a minor in social and economic justice.

MEJO 141 also meets the General Education requirement for philosophical and moral reasoning (PH) 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.

**About the content**:  This course may at times include topics, materials and discussions that can be disturbing or distressing, and 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 you 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://campushealth.unc.edu/services/counseling-and-psychological-services>.

**Required Text**:

Associated Press Stylebook, 2019

***Media Ethics: Issues and Cases***, 9th edition, by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins.

At least one copy is available at the Park Library, and the bookstore now has textbook rentals. The textbook will be supplemented by articles or **other 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, share knowledge, etc. See participation, below.

**Professional curiosity**: This is a real-world class in which we’re going to examine the challenges and dilemmas of today’s media and communication professions. You’ll need to keep up with what’s going on in the world and in your profession, as current events and issues will play a large role in the class. Take some time each week to check out the news in papers, magazines, TV and/or online – one resource I like is *The Skimm* (<http://www.theskimm.com/>). Keep an eye out for ethical issues facing professionals in your field by taking a look at the trade journals available in the Park Library (second floor of Carroll Hall) or online. Feel free to raise topics in class. If something interests or confounds you, raise it. Let’s talk about it.

**Honor Code:** You areexpected to conduct yourself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://studentconduct.unc.edu/>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. After all, this is an ethics class; there will be zero allowance for ethical lapses. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. We are going to spend much of a class discussing plagiarism. There will be no excuses. Your work will be your own. You may find the full text of *The instrument of student judicial governance* here: [https://studentconduct.unc.edu/sites/studentconduct.unc.edu/files/documents/Instrument.pdf](https://studentconduct.unc.edu/sites/studentconduct.unc.edu/files/documents/instrument.pdf).

**Diversity and Inclusion:** The School of Media and Journalism adopted diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements in spring 2016 with accompanying goals: <http://www.mj.unc.edu/diversity-and-inclusion>. Additionally, the University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined here: <http://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/>. 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, please bring it to my attention or to The Office of the Dean of Students, at [dos@unc.edu](mailto:dos@unc.edu) or 919/966-4042.
* **Special Accommodations**: If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Resources & Service Office website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>, call 919/962-8300, or use NC Relay 711.

**Attendance *and* Participation:** I understand - the class is at 8 am.And we’re discussing ethics, which might at first seem like a terrible topic for such a wretched hour. But, you have to be in class. We will be discussing these issues in depth, and the quizzes, papers and exams will be drawn largely from what comes from these discussions. You need to be here. Please ***sign yourself in*** each class period you attend.

You may be absent from class three times (“excused” or “unexcused”) before I take points off for missed classes. **Please note**, however, that you are still held accountable for any material covered during classes, and you will lose credit for any in-class assignment or other activity completed during classes you miss. It is your responsibility to sign in each class period. You do not have to notify me of your reasons for your absences, nor do you have to provide a doctor’s note. Use your absences wisely. If you know you need to be absent for university-related activities or other obligations, be sure to factor those into your absences. For each class you miss after three, your final grade will be lowered by three points. For example, if your grade average is (81), a B-, and you have four absences, your final grade will become (78), a C+.

**Additionally**, participation is important. You are expected to be active either in class discussions, through Sakai message boards, or both: Ask questions, offer your opinions. And challenge me and your classmates. The class is about learning to think critically about complex issues, which are often without a clear sense of right or wrong. A robust dialogue is key. Here is the other key: Though we may discuss things that prompt passionate disagreement, these conversations will be civil and respectful. Everyone will be heard, but a**ny disrespect, or name calling will have severe consequences.** Here are the guidelines I follow for determining the participation portion of your grade.

* **A** students participate in most of the class discussions during nearly every class period (or try to participate by raising their hands often when questions are asked) **and/or** contribute on Sakai Forums at least twice weekly. Consistency is important. Students contribute interesting and/or thought-provoking ideas and occasionally bring in outside material relevant to the class and to the readings. They don’t talk simply to hear their own voices, and they do not take over the discussion, but let others have a turn. They’ve probably asked some interesting questions along the way. They arrive to class on time and do not miss classes. (9-10)
* **B** students participate in some of the class discussions each week **and/or** contribute on Sakai Forums at least once or twice weekly, but either are not at quite the same level and/or comments are not always as insightful as the A students. However, they still have some interesting things to say or questions to ask whether in class or online. They may have no absences and they arrive to class on time. (7-8)
* **C** students may participate in class or on Sakai Forums from time to time but mostly prefer to lurk. They may have had some pretty good things to say but just don’t speak up/contribute online too often. They may have no absences or perhaps they have more than they should. They may be tardy on occasion, without any comment. (5-6)
* **D and F** students have barely said anything all semester whether in class or on Sakai Forums, or even if they have contributed occasionally, they might have too many absences. They are mostly lurkers even if they have fairly good attendance. They tend to respond only when called on. They may or may not have arrived to most classes on time. (<4)

**Assignments and Deadlines**: All outside assignments are due at the beginning of the designated class period (aka, 8 am). Late papers will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree beforehand that it can be late. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline – a grade of F will be recorded. In-class assignments are just that – we’ll work on them in class and you will turn them in when class ends. **Missing an in-class assignment constitutes a zero for that item.**

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| **Your final grade** will be based upon  \*Papers 15%  \*Participation (in class and/or on Sakai) 10%  \*In-class assignments, quizzes, etc (*lowest dropped*) 15%  \*Research participation 5%  \*Test 1 10%  \*Test 2 10%  \*Midterm exam 15%  \*Final exam 20% | **Grading Scale**:  A = 90-100  B = 80-89  C = 70-79  D = 60-69  F = <60  (and +/- as appropriate) |

**Sakai**: Valuable information and tools are available through Sakai. As a student registered in MEJO 141, you have access to this site. Please use it regularly, especially under:

* ***Forums***: Participation in Sakai discussions counts as class participation. It’s a place to continue and/or spark class discussion at any time – even if it’s a topic we’ve already covered. Post opinions, brainstorms, afterthoughts, new ideas, links to articles you’ve read, pose questions, make announcements, etc. All postings must adhere to University policies and my standards of civility and respect.
* ***Syllabus***: The syllabus for this class is posted in this section. We are going to go over much of the syllabus on the first day of class. You’re responsible for the information listed here. And if you mention this line to me privately, I’ll drop your second lowest quiz grade. Your lowest will already be dropped.
* ***Gradebook***: I will hand out graded assignments in class. If you have a question about a grade, please bring it to my attention within a week of it being posted or handed out. Don’t wait until the semester ends, when I will be far less likely to listen to your argument.

**Research Participation Requirement**: Students in MEJO 141 are required to complete two hours of research over the course of the semester. There are two ways you may fulfill this requirement. You can 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.  The second way to fulfill your research participation requirement is to **(a)** write assessments (two pages each) of two study topics in Journalist’s Resource (<http://journalistsresource.org/studies>); or **(b)** write two two-page summaries/critiques of academic research articles.  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 in the following journals:  *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Mass Media Ethics, Mass Communication and Society, Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, and *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. Get some guidance here: [http://guides.lib.unc.edu/jomcResReq](http://guides.lib.unc.edu/jomcresreq). Your summaries are due no later than Thursday, Dec. 14, at 8 am: our final exam date and time. Early papers are accepted with gratitude.

**A Few Words on Grades**: I will 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 discipline; 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 reasons, 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.

**The Stolen from the Boynton Corollaries**: Here are some tips from another instructor, that seem pretty spot on to what I’ll be looking for:

**A**: Your work is “wow!” Your thinking is clear and original. Your assertions are logically supported with plenty of relevant evidence. Your writing is strong and grammatically correct.

**B**: Topics are carefully and thoughtfully covered. Superficial flaws in logic, evidence, or organization exist, but your case is clear and on-target. Writing is strong with very few errors. Your work is quite good.

**C**: One or two minor elements of the assignment or evidence are weak or missing. Organization is adequate. Writing contains several misspellings or grammatical errors. Your work is average (which, BTW, is not a bad thing!!).

**D**: Several elements of the assignment or evidence are missing. Organization is haphazard. Writing contains numerous mistakes and detracts from the message. Your work is below average.

**F**: You miss the point of the assignment, or you don’t complete the assignment. Most or all of the required elements are missing. Writing is poor and it’s difficult to discern the message. Your work is failing.

**Basic guidelines**:

* **Be on time** – it’s a matter of professionalism, responsibility, and mutual respect (all huge themes of this course). Class starts promptly at 8 a.m. If I can get here on time, so can you.
* **Be respectful** – The topics discussed in class might generate some intense disagreements. That is ok; these are weighty subjects with lots of gray areas. But, we will be respectful of other points of view. You don’t have to like what classmates are saying, but you do have to afford them the same courtesy you will be afforded. I simply will not tolerate incivility. You will not be censored, but you will be courteous.
* **Respectful part 2** – You don’t need to ask permission to go to the bathroom, but try to leave the room quietly.
* **Turn off the ringers** – Turn off the ringer to your phones before class starts. Treat this like the ballet or a small theater. If you are expecting an emergency phone call, let me know before class, keep the phone on silent and leave the room quietly if need be. If there are interruptions I will ban phones from the class and begin to deduct points. And no faces buried in phones during a lecture or discussion. It’s just rude. Yes, I will take points off for rudeness in an ethics class.
* **Keep the classroom neat and clean** – Pick up after yourselves. It’s a super-early class, so by all means bring in coffee and non-stinky breakfast foods. If there are any nut allergies we’ll ban nuts too, but I don’t care if you have some reasonable classroom foods. Just take your trash with you.

**Week by Week – MEJO 141-006 for Spring 2020**

**\*\*\* Please note: this schedule is subject to change along with current events, speaker opportunities, hurricanes and the like – I will advise\*\*\***

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| **Date** | **Topic** | | **Readings and Assignments for this day** | | |
| Jan. 8 | Welcome. Introductions. Review syllabus.  Why are we here? Who cares about ethics? What the heck is an ethic? | | Syllabus review. What unifies ethics across the communication industry?; Why does all this matter? How to write a college paper. A preview of what’s to come. | | |
| Jan. 13 | How to begin thinking about ethics; What were they thinking?; | | * Principles of ethical journalism (email) * SPJ Code of Ethics (email) * Getting Personal (email) * Down the rabbit hole in a rental war (email) | | |
| Jan. 15 | Getting our bearings and laying foundations: initial viewpoints; what is plagiarism? | | * Ch.1, Media Ethics * *United Grapples (Sakai)* * *Top Ten mistakes* * 5 common excuses for plagiarism (Sakai) | | |
| Jan. 22 | Aristotle, Hulk Hogan and R. Kelly | | * That R. Kelly ‘cult’ story almost never ran (Sakai) * The First Amendment bubble … (Sakai) * Inside the pied-piper of R&B’s ‘Cult’ (Sakai) * Paper 1 due | | |
| Jan. 27 | Moral Development | | * Ch. 11 * *Why our children don’t think there are moral facts* (Sakai) * Quiz 1 | | |
| Jan. 29 | Truth and Fake News | | * Ch. 2 * Why facts don’t change our minds * All Politicians Lie | | |
| Feb. 3 | Fake News 2 | | * 10 questions for fake news * Fingerprints of Russian Disinformation * Russian Propaganda … * Quiz 2 | | |
| Feb. 5 | **Test #1** | |  | | |
| **Date** | **Topic** | | **Readings and Assignments for this day** | | |
| Feb. 10 | Fake News History: War of the Worlds. Did newspapers in 1938 exaggerate the panic caused by Orson Wells and the War of the Worlds? | | * Radio listeners in panic (Sakai) * The myth of the War of the Worlds panic * ‘War of the Worlds’ Behind the 1938 Radio Show panic (Sakai) | | |
| Feb. 12 | War of Worlds part 2 | |  | | |
| Feb. 17 | Empathy and Hypocrisy | | ▪ The good and bad of empathy   * The limits of empathy * The truth about hypocrisy * If Lions could talk (Sakai) | | |
| Feb. 19 | The limits of listening | | * Vox * Mona Lisa’s smile * Ch. 4 * You are not brave | | |
| Feb. 24 | The limits of listening continued | | * Talking to strangers * Quiz 3 | | |
| **Date** | **Topic** | | **Readings and Assignments for this day** | | |
| Feb. 26 | Diversity | | * *Has diversity lost its meaning?* (Sakai) * “He’, ‘She’, ‘They’ and ‘Us’ (Sakai) * What is terrorism | | |
| Mar. 2 | Diversity Part 2 | | * A white director, the police, and race in ‘Detroit’ (Sakai) * The Washington Post just illustrated the biggest flaw … (Sakai) * Empathy paper due | | |
| Mar. 4 | Review for Midterm | |  | | |
| Mar. 8 | **Midterm** | |  | | |
| **Mar. 6-15** | **Spring break!** | | **Classes resume March 19.** | | |
| Mar. 16 | History of investigative journalism | | * Muckrakers * Teddy Roosevelt * Triangle Shirtwaist Fire * The Jungle | | |
| Mar. 18 | Richard Griffiths | | * Guest speaker | | |
| Mar. 23 | Vietnam changes everything | | * Vietnam podcast * Yellow Journalism * Watergate | | |
| Mar. 25 | Leaks: Pentagon  Papers | | * The ethics of leaks * Lying about Vietnam (Sakai) * Abroad at home … (Sakai) * Quiz 4 | | |
| Mar. 30 | | Rolling Stone | | * A Rape on Campus * CJR report |  |
| Apr. 1 | | Rolling Stone continued | | * Penn State * *Weinstein*   ▪ *New Yorker*  ▪ *The Gawker effect short-lived?* |  |
| **Date** | | **Topic** | | **Assignment for this day** |  |
| Apr. 6 | | TEST #3 | | * TEST #3 |  |
| Apr. 8 | | Photos | | * Ch. 8 * Face to face with tragedy (Sakai) * A Pulitzer-winning photographer’s suicide * What the image of Aylan Kurdi says … (Sakai) * The Atrocity of representing atrocity … (Sakai) |  |
| Apr. 13 | | Photos continued | | * Guest lecturer * Final paper due |  |
| Apr. 15 | | Balancing democratic ideals  and economic realities | | ▪ Ch. 6  ▪ What does it all mean? What are we to do?  Quiz 5 |  |
| Apr. 20 | | Loose ends | |  |  |
| Apr. 22 | | Review for final | |  |  |
| May 1  Friday | | **Final exam**, 4 pm | | Note date and time |  |