

Media Ethics - MEJO 141.1

Classroom: Online
Time: Asynchronous

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Office hours: Online 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, new media, 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.

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.

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.
 - Fill out the [personal survey](#)
 - This will help me get to know you and saves us all a lot of time and effort
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Course Structure

This course has moved online due to COVID-19. I know that there is a timeslot listed on ConnectCarolina, but we will be conducting class asynchronously. I think that will be the easiest thing for everyone.

Everything we do will be on Slack. I have a few reasons for this:

- It gives us a good way to communicate that is accessible from mobile devices in the event that not everyone has sufficient tech at home.
- It facilitates one-on-one communication with me and with one another without having to share personal contact information.
- Slack is often used in professional settings, so it's good to get used to it now.
- Sakai is the worst and I'm sure we could *all* use a break from Zoom.

Here's how things will work day-to-day:

- I will post the day's lecture by 9am at the latest (often, I will post it the night before) on the #slides channel. Sometimes, this will include a full recorded lecture. Others, it will just be supplementary materials or commentary on that day's readings.
 - When it's a full video, you have to watch the lecture. I'm going to be checking the analytics.
- You will be expected to engage with the material and/or one another in the #discussion forum.
 - I'll start the discussion with prompts to make it a little easier.
 - You don't have to comment *every* day, but you should be doing it more often than not.

- Please interact with one another. You don't have to have groundbreaking feedback or comments, but I also don't want to see too much of "I agree with what so-and-so said. Allow me to say the same thing in a slightly different way so that I get credit for contributing!"
- I'm going to want to see evidence that you've watched the lecture and that you've done the reading. You don't need to be citing page numbers or anything - nor do you have to reference both in *every* comment - but I want to see that you're engaging with both.
- I'll pop into the discussion twice a day: once around 2pm (eastern) and once around 5pm. I'm *not* going to be able to keep it open all day and respond throughout (nor would I expect that of you).

My teaching style for this class is *super* interactive. We usually work through cases and ideas together and I pull your responses and personalities into the lectures. Obviously, that's going to be different now (boo COVID). I wasn't teaching this in the spring so this style is new to me. Given that we're all in this together, here's my plan:

- I need to keep discussion as a part of your grade because it's too important to the nature of the course.
- That said, I promise to be very open with you about how participation is going. If I think you're not doing enough (etc) I'll let you know.
- Let's try it out this way for a few days, and if we find that it's not working, we'll figure out a new plan.

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 to me via email. If it's a group project, only one person needs to hand it in, but make sure everyone's name is on it. Please submit as a Word document or a Google Doc so I can easily make comments. **Please don't submit as a PDF as they are obnoxious to annotate.** 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 Obviously, we won't be meeting in person. I'm open, however, to hosting an open Zoom once a week for questions, chatting, etc. I have put a question on the survey to see if this is something worth doing.

(Online) 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. **Read before you hit send.** Really read and consider what the other person said. Re-read your own comment before you send it. Does it make sense? Is it fair and open-minded?

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 are a few things I won't stand for, including discriminatory and derogatory comments.

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 conversation, you may do so without penalty. If you need to, you can shoot me a message that explains why you dropped off the conversation (or why you don't intend to participate ahead of time) but that's not necessary. 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).

Attendance, Deadlines, and COVID-19

So, COVID. What happens if you get sick? What about a family member?

This class is *not* more important than your health or the health of a loved one. We will figure it out if this happens. I *do* want you to let me know if there is something going on, but I'll say this now and I'll say it as often as you need me to: *you do not need to apologize to me if something happens.*

This includes mental health concerns.

Attendance I won't be "taking attendance" every day. Like I said, I *will* be checking the analytics on the lectures, but I'm not going to penalize you if you miss some. I'm mostly doing that to be sure that people are actually engaging with the content. Given how bonkers the world is right now, I understand that we're all going to have off days. That said, if it looks like nobody's watching, I might need to rethink this policy.

Deadlines Generally speaking, deadlines are important in this class. We move quickly and I need to be able to keep on top of everything that's happening. If you have trouble meeting a deadline due to extenuating circumstances, please let me know and we will figure it out together.

Assignments

Discussion - 20%

I already discussed participation above. I will provide graded feedback at the end of every week for participation. That way, if you score lower than you would like earlier in the course, you have time to correct things before it is too late. Also, that helps to avoid the problem of everyone trying to comment a bunch at the end of the semester to make sure they get full credit.

Ethics in the News Presentation - 25%

You will be assigned one day during the semester where it will be your job to present a news item related to media ethics. It should be something that has happened within the last two weeks. You will share a link with the class at least one day in advance. On your assigned day, you will present your news item to the class, explaining what happened and outlining why it is an ethical dilemma. You can choose to present this however you'd like - you can record a lecture, make slides, or make some sort of handout. What I *don't* want is for you to send your classmates a paper for them to read <yawn>.

You'll post that on the #ein channel by 10am that day, alongside 2-3 discussion questions. After you post, it will be your job to check in on the discussion *at least twice* throughout the day. I want to see that you are providing thoughtful feedback and/or commentary on your classmates' points.

I'll provide more information about this project in class.

Response papers/small activities - 30%

Throughout the semester, I will assign small response questions and/or activities that you will complete on your own. These will be very informal - I am not worried about grammar or citations (etc) - I want to see that you're thinking deeply about the material. I promise these won't be difficult.

Final paper- 25%

You will have one final paper, to be written in groups of 3-5. I will poll the class in the first week to decide whether you would prefer to choose those groups on your own or if you would prefer that I randomly assign them. I recognize that it is not easy to co-author from a distance, but unfortunately, it is a part of our reality right now.

The final paper will be about 10 pages long. You will be given several options to choose between, to be discussed in class.

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

Participation	20%
Ethics in news	25%
Response papers/activities	30%
Final paper	25%

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.

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](#).

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

Dates	Topic	Assignment (due that day)
6/22	Welcome! Course intro & syllabus	
Addressing the Current State of the World		
6/23	Diversity and inclusion	Personal survey ; Readings on Slack
6/24	Diversity and inclusion continued	
Foundations and Ways of Thinking		
6/25	Ethical foundations	Ch 1
6/26	Ethical foundations continued	
6/29	Professionalism and codes	Readings on Slack
6/30	The nature of truth	Ch 2
7/1	Decision-making techniques	Pgs 70-75, 104-107
7/2	Objectivity	Readings on Slack
7/3	Independence Day - No Class	
Tech and New Media		
7/6	Algorithms	Readings on Slack
7/7	Platforms	Readings on Slack
7/8	Content Moderation	Readings on Slack
7/9	Data Tracking	Readings on Slack
7/10	Harassment	Readings on Slack
Practical and Social Issues		
7/13	Sensitive topics	Readings on Slack
7/14	Sensitive topics continued	

7/15	Democracy	Ch 6
7/16	Persuasion	Ch 3
7/17	Advocacy and Propaganda	Readings on Slack
7/20	Photo and video: graphic content	Ch 8
7/21	Photo and video: representation	
7/22	Privacy	Ch 5
7/23	Loyalties	Ch 4
7/27	Final Paper Due	