**MEJO 141.1 – Media Ethics: Fall 2020**

**Instructor: Angelia Herrin**

**Time: Monday/Wednesday 11:30 a.m.**

**Classroom**

**Zoom Room:**

[**https://unc.zoom.us/j/94354995996?pwd=aVBUeDhUbUhyUjV0b0dzcHc2YnpoQT09**](https://unc.zoom.us/j/94354995996?pwd=aVBUeDhUbUhyUjV0b0dzcHc2YnpoQT09)

**Classroom Password: 344476**

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**Phone: 857 753 6766**

**Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom**

President Trump describes the media in many ways: “Scum” “slime” “dishonest” and “disgusting,” purveyors of “Hoaxes” and “Fake News.” These terms, used indiscriminately, all hint at the idea that journalism is beset by lies, misinformation, conspiracy theories, rumor and  mistakes. The Fake News label seems to get plastered on any story that the President and his supports don’t LIKE.

Attacks on the integrity and ethics of journalists have been around a long time: After all, when President Thomas Jefferson came under criticism in office, he groused “Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper.”

But the ugly “spin” on media ethics and “nasty journalists” has increased in recent years, while trust in media has faltered. Let’s use this class to “unspin” this narrative and explore the ethical tools that good journalists use. Democracy needs good journalism – and an understanding of just what role journalism plays in giving people the information they need to make decisions, large and small, about their lives.

How much do you know about the ethical frameworks and process that journalists use to make decisions about what they cover and how they report? How do reporters and editors strive to be accurate and truthful, fair, thorough and independent? Is objectivity the highest goal of journalism – or are we talking about the wrong thing?

In this course we will examine these questions, while looking at codes of conduct, guidelines and philosophical constructs for ethical decision-making. We will study dilemmas and challenges that confront journalist every day, like weighing an individual’s right to privacy with the public need to know. Technology, particularly social media, has added new layers of complexity that we will need to consider, along with ongoing challenges around diversity, media ownership and visual journalism

And we want talk about transparency, and how we can give our audiences a better, clearer understanding of the decisions – and mistakes – we make. Student journalists will come away from this class with an understanding of the ethical principles that are the foundation of our work. Non-journalism students will gain some understanding of how editorial decisions are made — and whether there might be better ways of making them.

For all his griping, Jefferson understood how much is riding on journalism. “The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right” he wrote. “And were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

**Course objectives**

The purpose of this class is to help you understand and make effective ethical decisions about. By semester’s end, you should be able to:

* Understand ethical foundations and decision-making processes and how to apply those ideas to professional situations
* Be familiar the ethical codes of journalism
* Critically analyze current professional practices of “the media”
* Deploy systematic way to evaluate situations in which someone may come to harm from a story, to figure out if the harm is justified, to think about alternatives that might cause less harm
* Be able to conduct a good discussion about Fake News with your relatives at the next family gathering

**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.

***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. That means during the course of this semester, each student will complete at least 10 pages of writing. Our assignments, board postings and papers 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**:

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

The textbook will be supplemented by articles or **other readings, video and podcasts.** All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions so you are ready to answer questions, debate and ask more questions.

**Professional curiosity**: This is a real-world class in which we’re going to examine the challenges 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.  I like AXIOS, which delivers a smart early morning national round up to your mailbox: You should also be watching The News and Observer for local updates. Keep an eye out for ethical issues facing professionals. If something interests or confounds you, raise 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:** You have to be in class. Zoom takes roll, so we know who shows up. I also call on people randomly as we discuss cases, so don’t just turn on the computer: There IS a difference between attendance and participation. In short, attendance is expected but not sufficient condition for an outstanding participation grade. We will be discussing these issues in depth, and the quizzes, papers and exams will be drawn largely from what comes from these discussions.

Discussion is at the heart of this class, as you are building skills in decision making. Think of this class like driver’s ed. You can read the manual and pass the written license test, but do you really learn to drive without doing it? To master ethical decision-making, you need to read the book and hear the lectures, but you need to be working out these ideas with discussion and debate in class. : 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.

Though we may discuss things that prompt passionate disagreement, these conversations will be civil and respectful. Everyone will be heard, but **any disrespect, or name calling will have severe consequences.** Here are the guidelines 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 comment** on Sakai Forums. 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, 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)

You may be absent from class three (“excused” or “unexcused”) before I take points off for missed classes.

BUT you are still need to know any material covered during classes, and you will lose credit for any in-class assignment or other activity completed during classes you miss. 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 two, 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+.

**Assignments and Deadlines**: All outside assignments are due at the beginning of the designated class period. 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** is based on:  Participation (in class)                               15%  Assignments   (board posts, exercises)                            20%  Test 1                                                         10%  Test 2                                                         10%   Test  3                                                        10%  \*Midterm paper                                          15%  \*Final exam                                                20% | **Grading Scale**  A: 93-100 A-: 90-92 B+: 87-89 B: 84-86 B-: 80-83 C+: 74-79 C: 73-78 C-: 70-72 D: 72 -64  F: Below 64 |

**Sakai** and The Class Note:  Valuable information and tools are available through Sakai. Assignments will be posted for each day, reminding you what to read, what to post, what to turn it. BUT you will miss a lot of information and extra insights, if you are not also reading the Class Notes I send out. This will include reminders, assignment changes and answers to questions that other students may have raised. You want to read these: You NEED to read these. The email will go out, via Sakai to the email that you use for enrollment.  The note will also show up in Announcements on the Overview Page of the Class website.

About **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.

**How Instructors Think About the Grades in This Class (Borrowed from Professor Lois Boynton)** I couldn’t say it better, so I borrowed it and attributed it.

**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.

**SPECIAL NOTE**

**Forums:** Many of our homework assignments come in the form of forum posts. I will give each of your individual forum posts a number grade, 0-5 (0 if you just didn’t do it or turn it in on time).  At the end of the semester, I will take the average score out of all of your forum post assignments. That average grade is the grade I will give you for the ‘Forums’ category in our gradebook.

Here is the basic rubric I will follow when looking at your forum posts:

**Online Discussion Board Rubric**

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| **Contributions** | **Description** | **Points**  **Assigned** |
| Provocative | Response goes beyond simply answering the prompt; attempts to stimulate further thought & discussion | 4-5 |
| Substantial | Response provides most of the content required by the prompt, but does not require further analysis of the subject | 3-4 |
| Superficial | Response provides obvious information without further analysis of the concept; lacks depth of knowledge or reasoning | 2-3 |
| Incorrect | Response does not accurately address the prompt; rambling and/or without consistency | 1-2 |
| None | No response provided to the prompt within the associated timeframe | 0 |

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| **Basic Rules of the Road**: |

* **Be on time** – it’s a matter of professionalism, responsibility. Also, the instructor doesn’t like repeating.
* **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. You will not be censored, but you will be courteous.
* **Turn On Your Camera, Turn Off Your Phone**
* **Have fun –** We are talking about serious matters, but they involved the intriguing, exciting and often mystifyingly stupid ways that humans make decisions. So it won’t be dull!

**SCHEDULE MEJO 141-001 for FALL 2020**

**\*\*\* Please note: this schedule is subject to change due to current events, speaker opportunities, weather**

**Stay alert and read your weekly updates from your instructor**

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| **Date** | **TOPICS** | **READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS** | **COMMENTS** |
| **Aug. 10** | **EXPECTATIONS** | **Opening Day!** |  |
| Aug. 12 | Breaking the Ethical  Code? Who makes the rules? Who Enforces? | **Post** your ethics answers in Forum   * **READ** What is a Profession * **READ** SPJ Code of Ethics in Resources |  |
| Aug. 17 | Cutting on the Bias | **Post** Your Thoughts on Ace in the Hole in the Forum. Find Questions in Assignments   * **READ** Trust Media and Democracy Executive Summary in Resources |  |
| Aug.19 | Objectivity, and Balance and the View from  Nowhere? | **Turn in** Media Bias check exercise   * **READ** The Trouble with Balance in Resources * **READ** Objectivity and Moral Clarity in Resources * **READ** Change Your Thinking about Objectivity in Resources |  |
| Aug. 24 | Fake News and The Battle Over Truth  (History of Fake News/today’s challenges | **Post** View from Somewhere comments   * **READ** pages 24-27 Information Ethics in Text * **READ** Sullivan What Trump Calls Fake News in Resources * **READ** Fake News and Information Pollution in Resources * **READ** Fingerprints of Fake News in Resources * **READ** Ten Questions for Fake News in Resources   **AND** a fun cartoon link <https://www.cjr.org/special_report/villains-disinformation-steve-brodner.php> |  |

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| Aug. 26 | Philosophers | **Post** Your Fake News Argument   * **READ** Chapter One 1-20 * **READ** DOWN THE HOLE in Resources |  |
| Aug. 31 | Speaker! | **Post** Exercise in Forum   * **READ** CNN package in Resources |  |
| Sept. 2 | Fakers! | **Post** Plagiarism Question in Forum   * **READ** Patchwork Writing in Resource * **READ** Scandal package in Resources |  |
| **Sept. 7** | **NO CLASS** |  | **Labor Day** |
| **Sept 9** | **TEST ONE** |  |  |
| Sept. 14 | Moral Development and Unintended Consequences | **Post** “Shattered Glass” critique in Forum   * **READ** Chapter 11 |  |
| Sept. 16 | Guest Speaker | * **READ** Speaker Background Package in Resources |  |
| Sept 21 | Take Apart Potter Box  Is It ever right to lie? | * **READ** Chapter 4 * **READ** Is it Ever Right package in Resources |  |
| Sept. 24 | Loyalty: Who do You Serve? | * **READ** Chapter 4 * **READ** Social Media package in Resources |  |
| Sept. 28 | Loyalty, Empathy And Privacy | * **READ** Working Cases in Resources * **READ** CHAPTER 5 |  |
| Sept 30 | Privacy | **POST** critique of Frontline Package in Forum   * **READ** Privacy Package in Sakai |  |
| **Oct. 5** | TEST 2 | **Discuss Frontline** |  |
| Oct. 7 | Epic Fails  Rolling Stone Case | * **READ** Rape Case Package in Resources |  |
| Oct. 12 | More Epic Fails In Decision making | **Preview Mid-terms Project**   * **READ** The Great Take Down Debate in Resources * **READ** TARES Test, Pages 70-75 |  |
| Oct. 14 | Creating A Diverse World view | * **READ** Chapter 9 * **READ** Diversity Package in Resources |  |
| Oct.19 | Guest Speaker | * **READ** Can We Change This World Package in Resources |  |
| Oct. 21 | TARES IN ACTION | **GUEST SPEAKER**   * **READ** Political Waters Package in Resources |  |
| **Oct. 26** | **TEST 3** | **YOUR MIDTERM DUE OCTOBER 28** |  |
| OCT. 28 | Review midterm/ Political Coverage, | * **READ** Endorsements Package in Resources |  |
| Nov. 2 | Who Owns News? | **POST** “Goodnight and Good Luck” critique in Forum   * **READ** Chapter 7 |  |
| Nov. 4 | Balancing Democratic ideas | * **READ** Chapter 6 * **READ** Social Change Package in Resources |  |
| Nov. 9 | Photos: Anyone Can Take a Picture | * **READ** Chapter 8 |  |
| Nov. 11 | How We Lie To Ourselves with Charts | * **READ** Charts and Other Lies Package in Resources |  |
| **Nov. 16** | **LAST CLASS** | * REVIEW for Final!!!! |  |
| **Saturday**  **November 21** | Final exam is at NOON in Zoom | **FINAL EXAM** |  |