

**Media Ethics**

**Spring 2021 MEJO 141.005**

**Instructor:** Professor Autumn Lorimer Linford

**Class Time:**  Monday/Wednesday 9:30-10:45

**Office Hours:** Mondays 10:45-11:45

**Email:** alinford@live.unc.edu

[**Zoom Meeting**](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88583676903?pwd=MUQ4dUZ2Yk1oS3U4Y3lPUmd1ZHdxUT09)

**Meeting ID: 885 8367 6903**

**Passcode: 1BLf0e**

**Required Texts**

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

The text will be discussed at length and used in every class. All assigned readings should be completed before class. If you cannot afford the text, there are two copies available in the Park Library to read.

Other reading materials will be available on Sakai.

**Course Description**

This class examines relationships of professional ethics, ethical dilemmas, and ethical practices within a variety of media professions. This class provides students with opportunities to explore—in class discussions, class forums, papers, and presentations—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.

**Course Goals and Objectives**

By the end of the semester, students will:

* Integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations to resolve ethical dilemmas;
* Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discuss 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

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance is expected. As this course is primarily discussion-based, your presence is essential. Unexcused absences from more than three scheduled lectures will be considered egregious and may result in a -10% per day penalty counted against your final exam.

Every lecture will contain valuable information. If you *must* be absent or have a university excused absence, plan to obtain notes from another student in class.

**Late/Makeup Work Policy**

Due dates for assignments are provided on the course syllabus. Coming from the world of journalism, I consider all deadlines absolute. *Late work will not be accepted and will receive 0 points.* I will consider serious extenuating circumstances (hospitalization, etc.) on a case-by-case basis. Plan on submitting every assignment on time and formatted as specified.

**Participation and Professionalism**

Participation is expected. This is a discussion-based class, and every voice is valuable to us. That means you can participate *too much* just as easily as *too little*. We need to hear what everyone has to say!I am aware that not everyone is comfortable participating in the same ways. If you don’t feel confident speaking up in class, plan to participate in other ways, such as writing a comment on our zoom chat or taking the lead in a small group discussion.

IMPORTANT: Many of the examples we talk about will have no right answer. I expect professionalism and respectfulness in every discussion. We don’t have to all agree, but I do expect that you be respectful in your disagreements, and that you’ll be willing to listen to other arguments.

**Requirements and Grading**

NOTE: The Team Posts and combined TARES essay and presentation are equal to or worth *more* to your final grade than the final exam. This is consistent with my belief that it is more important for you to be able to think and write critically about media ethics than it is for you to be able to memorize the names of philosophers.Please organize your time and effort accordingly.

Instructions for each assignment can be found at the end of this syllabus. Assignments will make up the following percentages of your final grade:

Team Posts 30%

TARES Essay 20%

Team Ethics in the News Presentation 20%

Quizzes (6 total, lowest score thrown out) 10%

Final Exam 20%

**Weekly Schedule**

Our course schedule is split into two sections:

* Mondays: we will meet together synchronously for a lecture and group discussion.
* Wednesdays: classes will be asynchronous, allowing time for you and your team to meet and discuss each week’s case study/studies. I will be available to you for questions on our regular zoom link during Wednesday’s class time.

Class assignments are subject to change. I will provide at least 3 day’s notice for changes to the schedule based on the how the semester is going (for instance, if we need to spend more time on a particular topic). I will give you as much notice as possible for any changes due to unforeseen circumstances (hurricanes, murder hornets make a comeback, illness, etc.).

*TRIGGER WARNING:*

*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 away from the discussion, 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 (CAPS)* [*https://studentaffairs.unc.edu/about-us/departments/counseling-and-psychological-services*](https://studentaffairs.unc.edu/about-us/departments/counseling-and-psychological-services)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Topic | Required Readings | Team Presentation | Assignments Due |
| Wed., Jan. 20 | Syllabus, Signing up for teams and presentation times, Introduction  |  |  | Form groups of 5 |
| Mon., Jan. 25 | How to read a case study | M.E. Chapter 1Sakai Resources: Foundations – the Dead Guys!* Dead guys highlights

Ethical Communication Focus |  |  |
| Wed., Jan. 27  | Foundations | M.E. Case 1 – ASakai Resources: What were they thinking?! (Read all in folder) |  |  |
| Mon., Feb. 1 | Becoming a Moral Adult | M.E. Chapter 11 Sakai Resources: Developing Morally * Carol Gilligan’s theory of moral development
* Kohlberg’s theory of moral development
 |  | Team Posts |
| Wed., Feb 3 |   | M.E. Case 8-D (NOTE: includes disturbing photos) Sakai Resources: Foundations – the dead guys! * Kate Spade’s death and the unintentional consequences of suicide coverage
* ProPublica finds a side effect of transparency

On the First Amendment: Indiana University bigoted professor |  |  |
| Mon., Feb. 8 |  | M.E. Chapter 9Case 4-H: How one tweet ruined a life (p. 131-133)Sakai Resources: Standpoint and social justice* Standpoint Theory basics
* How Alexandra Bell is disrupting racism in journalism
 |  | Team PostsQuiz #1 |
| Wed., Feb. 10 |  | Sakai Resources: Developing Morally* Experience: I write fake news
* On a long-ago Christmas Eve, an editor understood what we were supposed to do
* Ad of the day: Whirlpool put washers and dryers in schools
* UW-Madison doctors photo to stress diversity
 |  |  |
| Mon., Feb. 15 | WELLNESS DAY – NO MEETING  |
| Wed., Feb. 17 | Standpoint and Social Justice | Sakai Resources: Standpoint and social justice* None of the 2020 presidential candidate’s websites are fully accessible to disabled voters
* ‘I left work as Michael and returned as Maeve’: A corp comms MD on coming out as transgender at Goldman. Sachs
 |  |  |
| Mon., Feb. 22 | Decision-making techniques | Sakai Resources: Standpoint and social justice * Implicit Bias
* The many voices of journalism

M.E. p. 5-8 (Bok Model), p. 105-109 (Potter Box) Sakai Resources: Decision Making – Potter, Bok and TARES * Rawls’ Veil of Ignorance
* Trying to decide if you should publish that dirty word? Aka, the potty box

Potter Box chart |  | Team Posts |
| Wed., Feb. 24 |  | Sakai Resources: Decision making – Potter, Bok and TARES* Students protest Jeff Sessions’ speech, police presence
* The Daily Northwestern drama over Jeff Sessions coverage is a teachable moment, journalism professors say

Statement from Medill Dean Charles Whitaker |  | Team PostsQuiz #2 |
| Mon., Mar. 1 | TARES | M.E. p.70-75 (TARES) |  |  |
| Wed., Mar. 3 |  | M.E. p. 80-97 |  |  |
| Mon., Mar. 8 |  | Sakai Resources: Decision-Making – Potter, Bok and TARES Questions to guide readings – Decision making(Be ready to apply TARES in class)  |  | Team PostsQuiz #3Team Effectiveness Assessment |
| Wed., Mar. 10 | Questions? | Meet to discuss any questions you’ve had as a team, then post those questions to Sakai!  |  | Team Posts—what questions do you have so far? |
| Mon., Mar. 15  | Professionals and ethics codes | Sakai Resources: Professionalism and codes* Twitter Says It Has New Rules to Curb Hate Speech Targeting Religious Groups
* The Ethics (& Economics) of Freebies
* Her Amazon purchases are real. The reviews are fake
 | Group #1 | Team Posts |
| Wed., Mar. 17 |  | M.E. Case 4G, p. 127-131Sakai Resources: Professionalism and codes* Characteristics of a Profession
* From JUUL to Facebook, Self-regulation is always bad PR

Students stand up to the PR machine + why we said no + on integrity |  |  |
| Mon., Mar 22 | Truth Telling | Sakai Resources: To tell the truth* On defining truth
* Op-ed: Bias is good. It just needs a label
 | Group #2 | TARES Essay DueTeam Posts |
| Wed. Mar. 24  |  | M.E. Case 2D p. 51-53Sakai Resources: To tell the truth* Monsanto’s Spies (note: there’s at least one swear word in this story)
* TV pundits praising Suleimani assassination neglect to disclose ties to arms industry
 |  |  |
| Mon. Mar. 29 | Objectivity and framing |  Sakai Resources: Objectivity, frame, advocacy journalism * How to Be (or Not to Be) an Advocacy Journalist
* Against objectivity
* False media balance
 | Group #3 | Team PostsQuiz #4 |
| Wed. Mar. 31 |  | M.E. Case 2F p. 55-57Sakai Resources: Objectivity, frame, advocacy journalismSnake-handling Pentecostal pastor dies from snake bite |  |  |
| Mon., Apr. 5 | WELLNESS DAY NO MEETING  |
| Wed., Apr. 7 | Visual Ethics | M.E. Chapter 8 Sakai resources: Visualizing ethics * Fake videos of real people – and how to spot them
* ‘Napalm girl’ photographer returns – with iPhone, Instagram
 |  |  |
| Mon., Apr. 12 | Persuasion | M.E. chapter 3Sakai Resources: Persuasion* unspun – chapters 2, 3, and 4
 | Group #4 | Team PostsQuiz #5 |
| Wed., Apr. 14 |  | Sakai Resources: Persuasion* Women inmates: Why the male model doesn’t work
* ‘Meth. We’re on it’ campaign rolls out in South Dakota to confusion, ridicule
 |  |   |
| Mon., Apr. 19  | Privacy | M.E. Chapter 5  | Group #5 | Team Posts |
| Wed., Apr. 21 |  | M.E. Case 9C p. 305-307Case 6B 190-193Sakai Resources: Privacy* Heroin addiction: Why we took on this 7-day project
* Seven days of heroin: This is what an epidemic looks like (peruse the series just to get an idea of what’s in there)
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| Mon., Apr. 26  | Loyalties |  M.E. chapter 4 | Group #6 | Quiz #6 Team Posts |
| Wed., Apr. 28 |  | Sakai Resources: Loyalty* Social contract
* Declaration of Independence
* In a heartbreaking open letter, a father denounces his son’s participation in the Charlottesville white nationalist rally

One person’s tragedy, another person’s prize |  |  |
| Mon., May 3 | FINAL REVIEW |
| Thurs., May 13, 8 a.m. | FINAL EXAM  |

**Honor Code**

Students must adhere to the letter and spirit of the [university honor system](http://honor.unc.edu). Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated – this includes plagiarism, cheating or any false means of obtaining a grade – and may result in failure of the course, and suspension or expulsion from the university. If I suspect academic dishonesty, I have a duty to report it to the MJ-School’s senior associate dean for undergraduate studies, the Student Attorney General, or the judicial programs officer in the Dean of Students’ office for further action. For information on how to avoid plagiarism, go to The Writing Center’s [plagiarism](https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/) site.

**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/>

**Diversity:**The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is [here](https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/). 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.

**Title IX/SAFE at UNC**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here <http://campusconversation.web.unc.edu/resources/>

**ACEJMC values**

The School of Media and Journalism’s accrediting body outlines a number of values that our majors should be aware of and competencies our majors should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate from our program. You can learn more about them here under the heading “Professional values and competencies” <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

In this class, we will focus on the following values:

* think critically, creatively and independently;
* critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
* contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

**TEAM POSTS—30%**

On the first day of class, you will be asked to form a team of 4-5. You will be a member of this team for the entire semester (no takebacks or switches allowed), so CHOOSE WISELY and BE NICE. Every professional in our field will work with a team at one point or another, and it essential to learn how to focus on a goal, work together, and respectfully discuss issues.

Everyone has been forced to work in a dysfunctional group before, and it’s awful. Don’t be the person making everyone else miserable by not turning in the work on time/showing up late/being a jerk/being disrespectful/relying too much on the need of the “smart kid” to get a good grade/etc.

Every week, there are multiple case studies marked on the syllabus for your Wednesday readings. Sometimes the readings will come from our book, sometimes they will be on Sakai.

YOU will be responsible for reading each of the case studies for that week before your team meeting.

YOUR TEAM will be responsible for meeting together (you can meet during our scheduled Wednesday morning time, or at a different time that works for the group) and discussing that week’s case studies. Then, you will be responsible for choosing ONE case study as a team to dissect.

During YOUR TEAM meeting, you will each have a rotating role: Discussion Leader, Historian, Creative Connector, Devil’s Advocate, Reporter. Expectations for each role are discussed on the next page. You will each be expected to contribute to these small group discussions, so be prepared.

After your meeting, YOU will be responsible to post on the correct Sakai forum your findings. The Discussion Leader will start the thread for your group by Wednesday at midnight, then the rest of your team can add their parts before class on Monday. Write the name of your individual role at the top of your post.

Posts will be graded individually. Twice during the semester each group will be given the chance to assess your team’s effectiveness, once partway through and the other at the end of our time together. This assessment will help inform 5% of your individual Team Posts grade and help me know which teams may need extra help.

See next page for team responsibilities.

[by Desiree Griffin, UNC Psychology and Neuroscience]

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| Role | Responsibility | Sakai Post |
| Discussion Leader | Develop at least **three discussion** questions that can help everyone in your group understand the main points of the assigned reading. Don’t worry about small details. Your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and to share reactions to the text. Be prepared with your own brief answers to your questions. You are responsible for convening and facilitating your group’s discussion.  | You will post at least three discussion questions with your own brief answers and a description of at least two ethical issues raised. **You are responsible to start a Sakai thread for your group every Wednesday by midnight.**  |
| Historian | **Gather background information** pertaining to the reading. That might include other things the author has written, other pieces that elaborate on the points raised, professional information about the author(s), blog posts/comments about the article/topic, etc. The background information is meant to provide more context for the reading.  | You will need to post at least two sources of background information with a brief description of why that background information is helpful in better understanding the context of the reading. Post due to Sakai thread by the start of class Monday.  |
| Creative Connector | Help your group make connections to other important ideas in the reading and the class more generally, and to other cultural, social, political ideas including media content that can **help illustrate ideas or concepts in the reading**.  | You will need to post at least two connections, including a summary of the connections and discussion questions to help others make the connections themselves. Post due to Sakai thread by the start of class Monday. |
| Devil’s Advocate | (Respectfully) challenge the ideas of the team by developing a list of critical, **thoughtful questions and arguments that might be raised by critics**  of the author or by those with different points of view.  | You will need to post at least two challenging questions or arguments, including a brief explanation of why you are making this critique. Post due to Sakai thread by the start of class Monday. |
| Reporter | The reporter’s role occurs during and after the team discussion. Your job is twofold: first, during the discussion, you will **take notes on the discussion and will summarize its main points**; and second, be sure to participate in the discussion! You are not meant to be a stenographer. Rather, you will act as a meta-discussion observer, looking for areas of confusion or disagreement, which you can bring up for discussion. What did you agree/disagree on? What readings or ideas were most interesting or controversial? In general, how did the discussion go? Was it beneficial?  | You will need to post your report of the group discussion to Sakai thread by the start of class Monday.  |

**TARES ESSAY—20%**

You will be asked to write a 3-4 page essay assessing a current media ethics issue (from sometime during 2020-2021) using the TARES test. You choose the topic and media type. You could analyze an ad, PR campaign, editorial, news article or video, or even a series of tweets from a media professional. Make sure to fact check the issue at hand—check to make sure the content you are analyzing has all the pertinent information. Do your own fact checking. If an ad is sponsored by an organization, find out what you can about that organization. Has anything crucial been omitted or glossed over? If you get stuck, the Park Library website has a ton of wonderful resources for fact checking: <http://parklibrary.mj.unc.edu>

Please note: Ads and other persuasive messages are inherently one-sided/biased/opinion based. Those attributes don’t automatically make them unethical. Objectivity is important for news stories but not a factor in ads and other persuasive materials. Please do not report that a message is unethical because it doesn’t provide a balanced perspective on the issue or about a candidate’s opponent. Nor is it unethical if the link it provides is more detail on the candidate’s or organization’s perspectives. And there’s no need to state that an ad or promotional message is biased… water is wet, too, but there’s no need to say that!

Make a decision about how ethical your source material is, then defend your decision.

See pages 70-75 in Media Ethics for a refresher on TARES (Truthfulness, Authenticity, Respect, Equity, and Social responsibility).

Your essay should look something like this:

**Introduction**: What message are you assessing? Briefly describe its content. Include a link or a copy of the message for me to view. Be sure to accurately cite the source.

**TARES assessment:** Work through the steps of the TARES test. Make sure your writing is all relevant. Apply your veil of ignorance! I’m not discouraging you from having opinions – I’m asking you to look at perspectives outside your own.

**Decision:** Does the content pass the TARES test? If so, why? If not, why not? Remember that what constitutes passing is yours to determine – purists believe the content must meet all 5 criteria; others are fine if an ad passes a majority of criteria; still others weigh the impact of the problem – it may be minor or it may be over the top. Be sure to explain how you define “passing.”

**Conclusion**: Sum up your findings.

**Citations:** Be sure to include citations for the message you assessed as well as the sources you consulted to check fact, context, etc. CITATIONS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN YOUR PAGE COUNT. Please use Chicago citation style with in-text citations; be sure you use it correctly and include a proper bibliography/reference list. Yes, it’s annoying….it also reflects your attention to detail. Please don’t guess at how the bibliography should look; take the time to ensure it is accurate and stylistically correct.

Some citation resources:

* + [Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (OWL) reviews Chicago style](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/chicago_manual_of_style_17th_edition.html), including how to do in-text citations and reference lists. It includes guidelines for in-text citations and your reference list. It also has at least one sample paper so you can see how your citations and references should look.
	+ Please don’t use online citation generators (not even the one on Purdue OWL’s page or a UNC Library page) – some can be flawed; these tools only create citations from info you provide so if something’s missing, it will not catch your omission.

Your paper should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. Use 12-point font.

**Some notes on good writing:**

Style Taped to the desks and laptops of print journalists everywhere, you’ll see the following phrase: **“The easiest thing for the reader to do is stop reading.”** This maxim is true for all types of writing, not just news articles. Memorize it. Live it. Embroider it onto a cushion. The harder you make the reader work, the easier it is for them to miss all your brilliant ideas. Don’t try to use erudite language or long, complicated sentence structures. Consciously practice writing in a way that is easy to read. Your future professors, editors, email recipients, and holiday card-readers will thank you.

Revisions After you’ve written your first draft, find a literal way to change the way you see your writing. This might mean changing your font type and size, getting up from your desk and physically moving with your laptop to a new location, doing a handstand and reading it upside down, or saving your file, going to bed for the night, and then rereading your draft in the morning with fresh eyes. How you change your perspective doesn’t matter; that you do it does. Then, when you are ready to read your draft over again, read it out loud.

These seemingly simple tricks will force your mind to stop filling in the blanks with what you know and see what you actually wrote. You’ll be surprised by the errors you find.

**TEAM ETHICS IN NEWS PRESENTATION—20%**

You and your team will be asked to identify a news item dealing with a mass media ethics-related event that has been in the news sometime during the previous three 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, minus individual participation points.

Some good places to find topics are [Poynter’s Everyday Ethics Column](https://www.poynter.org/media-news/ethics-trust/) and [iMedia Ethics](https://www.imediaethics.org/).

Please have any background information emailed through Sakai by at least 2 p.m. 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 email before class on the day of your presentation.

This assignment consists of five components, and will be graded as follows:

Team Points:

Each team member will be awarded an equal amount of team points for their presentation, graded using a scale of 1 to 80 points.

* The information you provide via email to educate your fellow students on your topic prior to class (news items, videos, links, etc. ): 20 points
	+ Did you submit all your materials on time?
	+ Are they effective in explaining your example?
* The identification of an appropriate ethics codes to consider: 20 points
	+ Is the topic timely (within the three-week time frame), and does it involve an issue of ethical concern to mass media professionals?
* Your in-class presentation (using effective visuals such as a few PowerPoint slides): 20 points
	+ Do you effectively present your topic in class, using appropriate and effective visual aids (presentation slides, etc.)?
* Your assistance guiding the discussion in class: 20 points
	+ Do you effectively help guide class discussion, responding as appropriate to classmates’ comments and questions?
	+ 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?

Individual Points

Twenty points will be given individually based on your contribution to the team. After your presentation, you will be asked to award each of your fellow group members points for their contributions, using the following scale as a guide:

* 18-20 points: I love working with this person! They pulled their weight, their assignments were completed on time, and I knew I could count on them. Their contribution was invaluable!
* 15-18 points: This person was great! We had a couple of things come up as far as research or timeliness goes, but it’s nothing we couldn’t work through.
* 10-15 points: We worked OK together. They didn’t contribute very much.
* 5-10 points: This person dragged their feet on everything or were combative over ever issue.
* 0 points: Wait. There was another person in our group?!

These team-given points will guide me in awarding your final points for the individual portion of the presentation, but ultimately your score will be decided by me. If a majority of a team agrees that a member did not contribute their fair share, that will be taken into account.

**QUIZZES—10%**

There will be six reading quizzes taken throughout the semester. Each quiz will be available to you through Sakai for three days before the due date marked on the syllabus. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped at the end of the semester.

Each quiz is **CLOSED BOOK/CLOSED NOTE**. While I cannot enforce this rule other than asking for your integrity, I would remind you that this is an *ethics* class. Be cool. Don’t cheat.

**FINAL EXAM—20%**

During finals week, I will post a final exam on Sakai testing you on the concepts learned during this course. Again, this exam is **CLOSED BOOK/CLOSED NOTE**. And again, I’m aware that I can’t actually enforce that rule, since you’ll likely be taking this exam in your pajamas in your dorm/parent’s house/apartment/at an outdoor coffee shop while you use their WIFI. I can only remind you, AGAIN, that this is an *ethics* class. If you can’t keep yourself from cheating here in a 100-level university course, how will you respond someday when the stakes are even higher?

Professor Linford has a master’s degree in journalism from Brigham Young University. She worked as a newspaper reporter for 15 years and roughly 3 years as a photojournalist before attending the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media, where she is currently a doctoral student and Roy H. Park Fellow.