

# MEJO 141.1| Media Ethics

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## Course Details:

Classroom: No Classroom; It's Online!

Time: Asynchronous

**Instructor:** Jonathan Schlosser

**Email:** [JSchloss@unc.edu](mailto:JSchloss@unc.edu)

**Website:** [www.JonathanSchlosser.com](http://www.JonathanSchlosser.com)

**Office Hours:** Zoom; By Appointment

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## Welcome to Media Ethics!

### Course Description:

In this course, we will broadly examine the field of media ethics. This will include identifying your relationships with ethics, ethical dilemmas you may face, and ethical practices that will be useful in navigating a variety of media professions including journalism, visual communication, public relations, and advertising. Throughout the course, we will review ethical dilemmas that professionals have had to face in the past including case studies pulled from print, broadcast, online, and social media. With class discussions and written assignments, this course will explore ethical practices, effects of ethical practices, and the emerging ethical challenges that future media professionals may face.

### Specific Aims of This Course:

- Develop strong understandings of ethical foundations that can be applied to professional situations.
- Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discussing communication topics found in journals and other media
- Be able to think through potential ethical challenges and to apply skills to navigate them.
- Develop, defend, and apply a set of ethical guidelines to help navigate ethical challenges.

### Course Materials:

**Suggested Textbook:** *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases (9th edition)* by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins.

Please try to get this textbook if possible. This course can be taken without it, although it might be more difficult. **Please talk to me if you have any issues or concerns regarding the textbook as I may have some ways to help.**

The text will be supplemented by articles, other readings, and videos.  
**All assigned readings should be completed for each section.**

**Laptop:** You will need a laptop, or other computer, and stable internet access to participate in this course.

**Sakai** and **email** will be used to make announcements and distribute course material (readings, slides, handouts, assignment guidelines, etc.). Emails will be sent only to your UNC email account. **It is your responsibility to keep up with information, instructions, and/or assignments from class, including those not listed in this syllabus.**

### **Course Guidelines:**

- **Be respectful!**
  - Participation and discussion are key to the course – please respect what each of us has to say.
- **Keep an open mind!**
  - Many topics discussed in this course will be difficult or controversial. I hope that we can keep respect in place and listen to each other’s ideas. You may not agree but it is fair to give others their time and listen.
- **Please communicate!**
  - Many potential issues can be resolved through communication. If you have concerns, please feel free to email me and to talk about it. I am here to support your academic journey!
- **Protect yourself!**
  - If any material, topic, or conversation becomes too overwhelming at any point, please feel free to take a break and to step away. It is important to protect yourself.
  - Also, if there is anything that requires a conversation, please feel free to email me and to talk about it.
  - If you prefer to talk to someone else, there are multiple resources on campus, and if requested those can be provided to you.
  - I am Safe Zone, Green Zone, and Haven trained and I am here to help if you need or want it.

### **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://bit.ly/2b2FoBB>. 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 below are most relevant for this course:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**Prerequisites:**

None! With that though, MEJO 141 meets a General Education requirement and contributes to the Social and Economic Justice minor.

**Accommodations:**

If you 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 department and myself (preferably through ARS), as well.

Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS)

Phone: (919) 962-8300

Website: [accessibility.unc.edu](http://accessibility.unc.edu)

The Learning Center Service

Phone: (919) 962-7227

Website: [learningcenter.unc.edu](http://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.

**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](mailto:dos@unc.edu) or (919) 966-4042.

The University's *Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination and Policies on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct* are outlined in the following links:

- <http://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/policy-statement-on-non-discrimination/>
- <https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/>

\*For more information about discrimination, harassment, sexual violence, interpersonal violence, or stalking, please take a look at Safe@UNC (the main portal for resources and information):

- <https://safe.unc.edu>

**Honor Code:**

Academic Honesty will be enforced in this class. Therefore, you need to know and follow UNC's policies regarding academic honesty. 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.

You can learn all about the UNC Honor System and expectations for students here:

- <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>

**Concerning Course Content:**

This course may, at times, include topics, materials, and discussions that can be disturbing or distressing. It is difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate all the directions our conversations may take. If you find it necessary to excuse yourself, you may do so without penalty. However, you still are responsible for the material covered and should make arrangements to get whatever you missed. If you have any concerns, you can also schedule a meeting with me, or we could discuss during office hours. Please also remember that the university provides a number of resources and services to help you cope with any difficult challenges you face.

Counseling and Psychological Services (aka CAPS):

- <https://caps.unc.edu>

## Grading & Evaluation:

The table below outlines the percentage that each of the assignments in this course will count towards your final grade.

<b>Discussions</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Individual Essay</b>	<b>45%</b>

The University's Grading Standards will be applied to this course:

A	=	93 - 100
A-	=	90 - 92.9
B+	=	87 - 89.9
B	=	83 - 86.9
B-	=	80 - 82.9
C+	=	77 - 79.9
C	=	73 - 76.9
C-	=	70 - 72.9
D+	=	67 - 69.9
D	=	60 - 66.9
F	=	59 or Below

“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 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.

**Please Note:** Although grades are not negotiable, I will give every consideration to any concerns you have about an assignment grade, as long as the concern is identified promptly. If you have questions about or dispute a particular grade, this needs to be taken care of within a week of receiving that particular grade. The only grades that will be discussed at the end of the semester are those assignments you complete at the end of the semester. **If you reach out as soon as an issue arises, we can work to find solutions!**

**Final averages are not rounded;** to receive an A- for the class, for example, you must earn at least a 90 percent final average. A final average of 89.6 is a B+.

## Discussions

**For each lesson, you are required to submit a 150+ word, in-depth, and detailed discussion on Sakai and provide an engaging response to another student's post.** These discussions must utilize a concept learned in class to analyze an issue in mainstream media or popular culture. **We will learn several philosophical concepts that help guide our ethical decision-making; in the discussions, you are applying the concepts to real-world situations.** You are conducting a "mini" ethical analysis. Therefore, these discussions should be in-depth, thoughtful, well-reasoned, and should communicate an actual applied analysis. You should also try to incorporate citations where possible and to back up your claims with substantive research.

To summarize, in your 150+ word post, you should:

- **Define your outside case:**
  - Identify a mainstream or popular culture event that you want to analyze.
- **Define your concept:**
  - Identify the concept discussed in the lesson that you would like to utilize in your analysis.
  - Provide a brief definition or description of that concept.
  - Explain how the concept can be applied to this situation.
- **Put your concept to use:**
  - Use the concept to guide your analysis of the event.
  - Think about what it highlights, where it directs your focus, and what conclusions it helps you to draw.
- **Provide citations where necessary.**

An outside case can be an article, an advertisement, a broadcast, a magazine article, or any type of media. A "case study" is something that we use as an "example" to frame the context in which we want to conduct our analyses. It helps draw the boundaries! We use this to generalize a bit and to find potentially useful conclusions. For example, there is a Kylie Jenner advertisement from Pepsi that we will discuss in class (and it can be found easily with a google

search if you're interested). This ad could be related to concepts of justice, or social responsibility, or equity, or factual accuracy, or a bunch of other concepts discussed in this course, but the ad itself serves as the case study. If you find this concept hard to grasp, please reach out as we will use case studies regularly throughout the course.

Additionally, you should provide a ~100-word comment on someone's post. This comment should go in-depth, offer alternative perspectives, provide supporting or contradicting evidence, and work to progress the conversation. This comment should be just as in-depth as your original posting. This is your chance to offer your perspective on what someone says, to help support or contest their argument, to offer different evidence and different views, and to help us grow by appreciating the variety of opinions.

Primarily, be respectful of each other and maintain maturity in the discussion threads. Any malfeasance or ill-will may result in consequences. These may include the loss of discussion points and being barred from the forums, disciplinary action, or higher-level measures if necessary. I doubt this will be a problem, but the understanding needs to be made clear.

### **Individual Essay**

For this assignment, you will be tasked with writing, **a 10+ page paper** that **identifies a major topic** that you would like to comment on, **identifies a case study or two** that can be used to explore your larger topic, **employs a decision-making framework** to examine those case studies, and **presents larger findings and solutions** regarding the topic under consideration. The topic should be something that you are truly passionate about and can sometimes come from the case studies discussed in class. A case study here can be any media event of your choosing; whether that is a news article, a broadcast, a social media post, an advertisement, an ad campaign, or something else, it's up to you to choose. So, the possibilities for your work here are quite open, and I encourage you to explore and to be unique! Also, as a side note, the essays that contend with a topic that the author is truly passionate about have been much better papers in the past and have resulted in a much better experience.

This assignment should be a fair amount of work, and if done to an exceptional level will surpass the page limit with ease and will contend with a wide variety of competing opinions and perspectives. **The aim is to be working on these assignments throughout the semester and to develop your critical thinking abilities as we go.** Also, the assignment aims to help build your familiarity with ethics and ethical arguments and foster an appreciation for the diversity of opinions and ideas that can come into play in any given situation. While this may sound intimidating, **think of your work here as a chance to deeply explore a topic that you are truly passionate about and to learn new ways of thinking about complex issues.** Please look at this as an opportunity to grow and develop both intellectually and morally!

Overall, this assignment will demonstrate your ability to use a decision-making framework, to apply theory within that framework, and to show your critical thinking capabilities. Critical thinking, here, meaning that you can think through **ALL the competing factors** in a difficult ethical situation, assess **ALL differing ideas**, and contend with the **VARIETY of perspectives.**

It is suggested that you look at these assignments early on and begin working when you can. I will be available to discuss with you, to help you think through your topic, and to help guide you through your analyses. I am here to support you however I can, but **you** must take the initiative. Those who have put significant effort into this process have learned a variety of critical thinking approaches and have gained new ways of thinking about the world around them.

**Please see the posted assignments and rubrics on Sakai for more information, guidelines, and expectations.**

The topic approval part of this assignment is due **Friday, July 9 at 11:55 PM EST**.  
The final deadline for this assignment is **Thursday, July 29 at 11:55 PM EST**.

**Final Exam**

This will be a multiple-choice exam designed to test your knowledge of the material learned in class. The final exam will consist of 80 multiple-choice questions and all questions for the exam will come directly from the text and from lectures. The exam will be delivered online through Sakai. It will open at **8:00 AM EST on Monday, August 2nd and remain open until 8:00 AM EST Tuesday, August 3rd**. You can take the exam at any point during that time. You will have 2 hours from when you start the exam to complete it. To reiterate, you will only have 2 hours to complete the exam, but you can start it at any point within the 24-hour open period. The exam is open notes, open book, and open internet, but please prepare as the time limit may be tight. If you require any accommodations or have any concerns, please feel free to reach out.

**Key Dates:**

- Classes Begin: Monday, June 28
- Day Off For Fourth of July: Monday, July 5
- Classes End: Thursday, July 29
- Reading Day: Friday, July 30
- Exam Days: Monday, August 2 and Tuesday, August 3

**Schedule:** The schedule below outlines the major topics covered in the course, as well as important dates. This schedule is subject to change, especially if there are guest speakers or other influential events. Any updates will be clearly communicated and provided through Sakai.

<b>Suggested MEJO 141 Schedule Summer 2021</b>	
<p><b>Week 1:</b>  Monday, June 28 – Friday, July 2</p>	<p>Ethical Foundations Read: Chapter 1, Essay, and Case Study</p> <p>Information Ethics Read: Chapter 2 and Case Studies A-H, except C</p> <p>See Sakai for additional materials.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Week 2:</b> Tuesday, July 6 – Friday, July 9</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategic Communication Read: Chapter 3 and Case Studies A-G</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Loyalties Read: Chapter 4 and Case Studies B - H</p> <p style="text-align: center;">See Sakai for additional materials.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Week 3:</b> Monday, July 12 – Friday, July 16</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Privacy Read: Chapter 5 and All Case Studies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Photojournalism Ethics Read: Chapter 8 and All Case Studies (many of these contain sensitive content)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">See Sakai for additional materials.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Week 4:</b> Monday, July 19 – Friday, July 23</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Media Economics Read: Chapter 7 and All Case Studies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mass Media and Democratic Society Read: Chapter 6 and Case Studies A-G</p> <p style="text-align: center;">See Sakai for additional materials.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Week 5:</b> Monday, July 26 – Thursday, July 29</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Media and Justice Read: Chapter 9 and All Case Studies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ethical Dimensions of Art &amp; Entertainment Read: Chapter 10 and All Case Studies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Becoming a Moral Adult Read: Chapter 11</p> <p style="text-align: center;">See Sakai for additional materials.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Finals:</b> Thursday, July 29  Monday, August 2</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Final Essays Due!</b>  <b>Final Exam Online!</b></p>

