



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

MEJO 141.2 - Media Ethics Spring 2021

Instructor: Tegan Bratcher teganrae@live.unc.edu

Class place/time: Virtual Class *with scheduled meetings MW 5:00-6:15 p.m.

Office Hours: Zoom meetings by appointment – email to talk

Quick links: [Sakai](#) | [Semester sched/readings](#) | [Zoom](#)



Why are we here?

In this class we are going to examine relationships of professional ethics, ethical dilemmas, and ethical practices within a variety of media professions – print, broadcast, and online journalism; various visual communications approaches for news and business; public relations; advertising; and even hybrids. This class permits all students opportunities to explore – both in class/virtual and online discussions and written assignments/projects – 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.

What are our goals?

The purpose of this class is to help you make ethical decisions within your profession in an organized way. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations to resolve ethical dilemmas;
- Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discussing 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;
- Develop, defend, and apply your own set of guidelines to tackle ethical situations.
- Develop and enhance professional skills like classroom and email etiquette, public speaking and team work.

Class structure | Working online and semi-synchronously



This course will be structured semi-synchronously. Meaning that while the bulk of the work will be completed on your own time however there will be scheduled class meetings via zoom for workshopping and open forum with classmates and the instructor.

Readings, lectures, discussions, and assignments are the major teaching tools for this course. The professor will present lecture material relevant to class readings and, along with any guest speakers, provide real-world examples of a variety of ethical situations.

Our class is scheduled to meet this semester on Mondays/Wednesdays from 5:00 - 6:15 p.m. That said, the class **will not be meeting** every Monday and Wednesdays, but rather at every designated times throughout the month. There will still be roughly 75minutes of instruction time per week through videos, online class discussions, and online

activities. Each student is expected to read the assigned material and watch the assigned videos for the week, then contribute to meaningful discussions online and complete given assignments.

Finally, you will then publish at least three comments per week in our on Sakai forums site, where the lectures and assignments will be posted. The comments in the forums should be regarding that week's lecture, examples, and discussions. Comments must include complete sentences, and I expect at minimum 2-3 sentences per forum comment.

- To access the video for the day and discussion forum, visit our class Sakai page.
- To access the gradebook, course assignments, and tests, visit our Sakai site.

Reaching the Instructor

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. **Email is the best way to reach me.** I will respond to emails within 24 hours. Please save questions regarding lengthy answers for zoom meetings. Also, **please arrange zoom meetings with me via email at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.** You should treat emails with me as professional correspondence. All communication should include your name, your class, and a professionally worded message.

Professional Courtesy

This is a real-world class in which we are going to examine the challenges and dilemmas of today's media professions. Curiosity – quite simply asking questions – is one of the foundations and driving tenants of our industries. In addition to staying current, it is imperative we all remain respectful of each other and differing perspectives or opinions. While we all may not agree on issues presented in class, we should respect each other's right to speak in class.

About the 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 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 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 (aka CAPS):

Reading material

This book is required for this class

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

There will also be supplemental readings for some weeks. Any readings outside of the required text will be in the Resources folder on Sakai. All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to ensure that you are ready to discuss, ask questions, offer opinions, and interact with one another. Sakai and email will be used to make announcements and distribute course material (readings, slides, handouts, assignment guidelines, etc.).

Participation and class expectations

Technically, we are “in class” this semester on Mondays and Wednesdays 5:00 – 6:15pm. However, semi-synchronous format of the class is designed to work with your schedule however best works for you.

Participation during this online session is **required**. Weekly participation in the discussion forums is expected and will contribute to 10% of your final grade. To gain the full 100 participation points, I expect at two-three comments per week in the forum. The more

post on a consistent basis, the higher your chance of getting the full 100 participation points. The comments should be relevant to that week’s lesson (reading, video lecture, website examples) and include complete sentences and complete thoughts. In your comments, you can either answer another student’s question, pose your own question, answer the questions I pose in the class website, or find your own example and describe it to the rest of the class.

Be respectful of each other in the discussion post – we are all adults, so I expect everyone to know what is and is not appropriate for discussions. Don’t make me have to call you out.

If you are unable to participate for any reason, then you will need to let me know in advance when possible. Lack of participation as a result of family death or health issues will be addressed based on the circumstances.

Consider the following rubric for participation for discussion posts:



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work

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you

A (90-100) Consistently participates in class/online at least twice a week. Has thought-provoking ideas, asks questions.	B (80-90) Participates in class/online twice a week at max, consistently throughout the semester. Good ideas and asks questions.	C (70-80) Participates in class/online from time to time. Mostly prefers to lurk. Pretty good input but is not contributing consistently.	D/F (69<) Barely says anything at all, both in class and online. Mostly lurks, even if there is good attendance.
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Late assignments will be docked 10% per day, and lack of participation in the discussion forum will result in deduction of points (-2 points per week of no forum activity). If you think that for any reason you will not be able to submit an assignment on time or engage in the daily class discussions, I highly recommend you communicate with me (via email) as early as you can to let me know.

It is your responsibility to engage with the weekly videos and materials, class conversations on Sakai, and turn in assignments polished and on time.

School Closure: If school closes before the official semester ends, then your grade will be based on the work completed.

Staying Current

This class uses the reading material and assignments to make sense of real-world issues. It is imperative that students are actively engaged in the day’s news/events. One app I like is Flipboard, or [The Skimm](#) (website). You can also find ethical issues that professionals in your field face by taking a look at the trade journals available on the [Park Library](#) website.

See something interesting? Bring it up in class or post the link to Sakai!

Assignments | Deadlines | Grades

Technology Policy: You will need a computer, tablet, or cell phone with internet connection in order to take this class. If you do not have access to a device with reliable internet connection, please contact me as soon as possible. Remember to always save a backup work all your work to the cloud, or a flash/jump drive. Save early and often. If you ever have technical difficulties, you should inform me as soon as possible.

Formatting and Writing Expectations: In this class you are held to professional writing standards on all assignments and in all forums. Professional writing is the correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation. You must proofread your documents carefully to ensure your writing is professional. As writers in the digital age, we are privileged to technologies that check our spelling and grammar. There is no excuse for any spelling errors in your documents or posts on Slack. When submitting your assignments, I will tell you on the assignment sheet how I would like you to format the document. Follow the formatting requirements in this table for all draft copy assignments where specific formatting and styling is not provided. Documents not meeting these standards will not be accepted and considered late until corrected. When in doubt use: Font (Times New Roman), Font Size (12), Page Margins (1in all sides), Number each page, Add name to the header, and double-spaced.

Grading

This course is based on a total of 600 points. 40% of your grade will be based on five main assignments.

Each assignment contributes to 40% of the overall class grade. Another 40% of your grade will be based on two major class projects. One assignment is an individual project worth 20% of the total grade, and another is a group project worth the other 20% of total grade. There will be one writing assignment, the reflection paper, worth 5% of your grade (50 points). Worth another 5% of your grade is the research requirement (details below) worth another 50 points. The final 10% of your grade is based on participation on the live virtual sessions of class and in the discussion forums on Sakai (100 points total).

Your final grade will be calculated using the University's grading scale: A, B, C, D, F with the plus or minus option for each letter grades A–D. I follow the University's grading standards. Here are tailored descriptions of the grade levels:

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. To achieve this grade, students should not miss class; students should read and critically engage ALL the assigned readings (textbook chapters and articles); complete assignments on time with the correct format, appropriate style, and with few grammatical errors; demonstrate their outstanding abilities; and stay informed on current events.

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. To achieve this grade, students may miss two classes; read the assigned readings (textbook chapters and articles); complete assignments on time with proficient formatting, styling, and editing; and stay informed on current events.

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. To achieve this grade, students may miss two or three classes; read some of the assigned readings (textbook chapters and articles); complete assignments but not on time with formatting, styling, and editing errors; and follow current events occasionally.

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 to pursue another discipline or try again later. To receive this grade, students miss more than three classes; occasionally read the assigned readings (textbook chapters and articles); does not complete assignments or does so with partially proficient formatting, styling, and editing errors; and does not follow current events.

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.

Assignments & Deadlines: All assignments must be typed, correctly formatted and turned in on time in Sakai. Late papers will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is due that it can be late. Late assignments will receive an automatic 10% per day deduction. I will not accept any assignment one week after the due date. The one-week mark is calculated one week from the beginning of class period (4:45 p.m.) on the date that the assignment is due.

Quality work and guidelines: Your assignments will be evaluated primarily on the quality of your ideas, but also on how clearly and persuasively you present those ideas. Graded assignments (group and individual) will lose points for lack of professional presentation, including mistakes in spelling, grammar, and

punctuation. Proofread your work carefully; most importantly, **think** about your work

Course Grade Calculation: I will calculate your final course grade as follows: (Since the University grading system does not calculate A+, an “A” final course grade requires a 95 or higher.)

Assignments	%	Points	Grading Policy*
Assignment #1 – Individual Bios	40	25	A=90-100
Assignment #2 – Plagiarism Exercise	40	50	B=80-89
Assignment #3 – Philosophers and Ethical Decision-Making chart	40	50	C=70-79
Assignment #4 – Ethics Code Scavenger Hunt	40	50	D=60-69
Assignment #5 – Diversity Game	40	25	F= Below 60
Ethics in the News Projects	20	100	
Group Ethics Projects	20	100	
Reflection Paper	5	50	
Research Requirement	5	50	
Participation	10	100	
Total	100	600	

Please note that every grammar, spelling, and punctuation error results in -2 points. Every fact error (i.e. misspelled name, wrong statistics, etc.) results in -10 points.

Main course assignments (200 points; 40% of final grade): You will be given five main course assignments mainly in the beginning of the semester. These assignments will complement the lectures and encourage you to think deeper on the foundational concepts we discuss in class. Assignments are to be independently completed and the guidelines will be posted and submitted via Sakai.

Two Major Projects (200 points; 40% of final grade):

- Group Ethics Project (100 points, 20% of final grade):** For this project, students will be split into groups by the instructor to complete a collaborative project. Each group member will contribute to the final project and participation will be based on the submitted recordings of the out of class zoom meet ups. The details for this project will be later discussed in class mid-semester.
- Ethics in the news presentation (100 points; 20% of final grade):** You will be assigned as pairs and asked to identify a recent (within the past year or so) news item dealing with media ethics. You will explain the item to the class and lead a short discussion (around 10-15 minutes). Each group member will receive the same grade for the assignment, unless a member does not show for the presentation or is demonstrating a clear lack of participation in the project. Groups will present on Oct 22nd and 24th, as designated by the weekly course schedule below. The goal of this exercise is to clearly articulate modern ethical issue(s) society experiences, identify the tools we might use to consider those issues, and use that information to inform a proposed plan of action. You will be responsible for providing adequate valuable content to yield productive discussion in class (remember, your ability to affect the quality of class discussion is part of your grade). It may be easier to pick a topic of interest to you!

Reflection Paper (50 points, 5% of final grade): The reflection paper will be a short writing assignment

meant for the student to reflect on the semester, considered all things and write a response to the lessons learned and projects completed throughout the semester. Details of the reflection paper will be released later in the semester.

Research participation requirement (50 points; 5% of final grade): Students in sections of MEJO 141 are required to complete three hours of research over the course of the semester. There are two ways you can fulfill the research requirement.

First, you can participate in three hours of academic research studies in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. Participating in studies is a valuable way for you to receive firsthand experience with research. If you are enrolled in another class that has a research requirement, it may also satisfy the research requirement for this course. If you have questions about the subject pool participation, please contact Professor Joe Bob Hester (joe.bob.hester@unc.edu). You must fulfill your participation in a research study by May 1, 2021.

Second, you can write **three two-page summaries and critiques of academic research articles**. Each review counts for one hour of research participation, so you can combine participation in the studies with article reviews to fulfill the research requirement. You may summarize any research article published in the past two years in the following journals: Journal of Advertising, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Public Relations Review, or Mass Communication and Society. You must identify the author, date, article title, and journal title on each of your summaries. Article summaries are due May 4, 2021.

Grading for research participation requirement 50 points (5%)

- 5% = Completing all 3 studies/3 two-page article reviews
- 3.33% = Completing 2 studies/2 two-page articles reviews
 - 1.66% = Completing 1 study/1 two-page article review
 - 0.83% = Completing .5 study/1 one-page article review

Active participation (100 points; 10% of your final grade): Active participation means that you contribute meaningfully to class discussions, activities, and through Sakai. Our class is relatively small, and it will be obvious who is and is not actively participating. How can you “actively participate?” Come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Ask meaningful questions. Respond to others’ questions and comments thoughtfully. Initiate relevant discussions. Students who attend class but do not adequately contribute to discussion, activities, and group work are not considered active participants.

A final (and important) note about grading and evaluation

If you have concerns about a grade, please inform me of this concern via email. I ask that you wait 24 hours after receiving your grade. Please outline your concern(s) and provide evidence to support your claim. You may challenge a grade up to one week after it has been posted on Sakai (this does not apply to grades posted during finals).

*Extra credit opportunities: Opportunities for extra credit may arise throughout the semester. Should there be any extra credit opportunities, I will inform you.

You deserve an instructor who is approachable, fair, and accessible. I welcome questions and challenges, and you will never be penalized for your opinions, as long as they are considerate of others. I will work my hardest to make this course enjoyable and interesting. Please contact me sooner rather than later if you are having problems understanding any of the concepts.

Important Info

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/>

Honor Code

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity and Inclusion

The School of Media and Journalism adopted [diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements](#) in spring 2016 with accompanying goals. It complements the University policy on [Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination](#). 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, bring it to my attention or The Office of the Dean of Students, dos@unc.edu or 919/966-4042.

ACEJMC Professional values and competencies

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines 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. No single course could possibly give you all these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. The values and competencies in bold are most relevant for this course:

- 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.