

# MEJO 141 Media Ethics Summer 2022 Syllabus

Monday-Friday 1:15-2:45 p.m. EST  
Zoom: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/97083012041>

## Instructor

Rhonda Gibson, Ph.D. (Please call me Rhonda. My pronouns are she/her.)

Office hours: I am regularly available through email.

If you like, we can also set up a time to chat by Zoom or phone or to meet on campus.

Office: Carroll Hall Room 376

Cell phone: 919 699-6567

E-mail (I will respond within 24 hours, even on the weekends): [gibsonr@email.unc.edu](mailto:gibsonr@email.unc.edu)

## Course Goals and Objectives

Welcome to MEJO 141! I look forward to getting to know you this semester.

We're here to learn about media ethics. Media professionals talk a lot about doing the right thing, but they're constantly criticized for ethical and moral shortcomings. In this class, we will discuss the ethical dilemmas that confront

professionals in digital, print, and broadcast news; advertising; public relations; photojournalism/graphic design; and social media. We will examine codes of ethics for each of these professions and evaluate how these guidelines have been applied in specific settings. In the end, this course is designed to familiarize you with the tools needed to make ethical decisions in a professional setting and to help you develop a personal yardstick by which to measure your own ethical decisions.



This is what I hope you're able to do by the end of our class:

- Integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations;
- Critically analyze media/communication professional practices through reading about/listening to/watching and discussing communication topics found in trade journals and other media;
- Compare ethical standards of media/communication professions and examine how similarities and differences help or hinder their professional relationships;
- Develop, defend, and apply your own set of guidelines to tackle ethical situations.

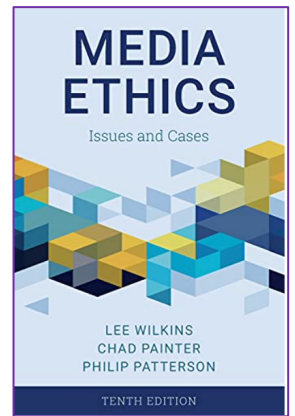
You'll get out of this course what you put into it, so your preparation for and involvement in class discussion are vital. Success in this course will depend upon your willingness to keep up with the assigned materials, participate in real-time class discussion Monday through Thursday and the asynchronous Discussion Board on Friday, and keep an open mind when dealing with issues and others' opinions. Here's to a good semester!

## Course Materials

The required text for this course is: *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases* (10<sup>th</sup> edition) by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins. (**Note:** You must have the 10<sup>th</sup> edition.)

The text will be supplemented by additional materials at no additional charge.

We use this textbook for every class session. All assigned materials should be completed before the class sessions for which they are assigned to ensure that you're ready to discuss, ask questions, offer opinions, disagree, share knowledge, etc. That's what will make this class useful and enjoyable.



## Grading

Course grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

Real-Time Participation/Discussion Board	20%
Final Exam	30%
Ethics in the News Presentation	15%
Interview exercise and paper	35%

Your final course grade will be calculated using the following scale:

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

*Please Note:* Although grades are not negotiable, I will give every consideration to 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 three days 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.

Final averages are not rounded. To receive an A- for the class, for example, you must earn at least a 90 percent final average.

# Assignments

## Final Exam

The closed-book final exam will count for 30 percent of your grade and will be from **11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. EST on Thursday, June 16**. It will have two parts: (1) an objective part with true/false and multiple-choice questions, and (2) an essay part. Questions will be taken from the assigned daily material (textbook, daily instructor comments/PowerPoints, and other assigned readings).

You will be required to take the exam in real time and on Zoom unless you have made other arrangements through the UNC Office of Accessibility Resources and Services. **Please do not ask to take the exam early.** For security- and honor code-related reasons, I will not give the exam before our assigned slot.

More details about the exam will follow.

## “Ethics in the News” Presentation

This is a fun assignment where you get to be the teacher for a day and lead an informal discussion about a topic that interests you!

Each of you will be assigned one class day during which you are responsible for informing the rest of the class about a media/communication ethics-related issue event that has been in the news sometime during the previous 10 days. Your topic can be related to any aspect of media and communication, but it **must have a substantial media/communication component to qualify for this assignment.**

On your assigned date, you'll be given the first 20-30 minutes of class to inform the class about your topic and lead class discussion. You may use video or presentation software or just your voice to present the material. Clearly explain the media/communication-related ethical issues involved (and suggest what type of professional ethics codes apply) and post one or two questions in the Zoom Chat to get the discussion going. This assignment counts for 15 percent of your grade.

**Your assigned EITN presentation dates are in green on the schedule at the end of this syllabus.**

Here are the criteria I will use to evaluate your EITN presentations:

1. Is the topic timely (within the 10-day time frame), and does it involve a substantial issue of ethical concern to media/communication professionals? (15 points possible)
2. Is the presenter prepared and on time? Is the presentation well thought-out, and does it stay within the timeframe of 20-30 minutes? (15 points possible)
3. Is the issue clearly explained? Are the media/communication-related ethical concerns clearly articulated? Are the appropriate media/communication ethics codes applied to the situation? (35 points possible)
4. Does the presenter do a good job leading class discussion by suggesting prompt questions, calling on classmates, and answering questions they have about the topic? (35 points possible)

## Interview Exercise and Paper

This assignment gives you the opportunity to network with a professional communicator and learn more about their job and the ethical dilemmas they face.

For this assignment, you will interview someone who has been in a media/communication-related position for at least three years and who is currently working in the field. Ask them about the types of ethical dilemmas that arise in their job. Ask them to

tell you about a specific ethical dilemma they have personally faced, the decision-making process they went through to address the dilemma, and the ultimate outcome of the situation. Ask if they would do anything differently if a similar situation would arise again.

Write a paper of 1,000-1,200 words that includes the following components: (1) details about the person you interviewed and their professional background, including their current job title and duties, (2) explanation of the general types of ethical dilemmas they most often face in their job, (3) explanation of the specific ethical dilemma they decided to share with you, with enough details to make it clear what ethical issues were involved and the role of your interviewee in the dilemma, (4) the decision-making process they and others involved used in addressing the dilemma and its eventual outcome, (5) their views on whether they should have done anything differently, and (6) your reaction to what you learned from the interview, specifically within the media ethics context of this class.

**Please send me an email by 5 p.m. on Friday, June 3 explaining who your interviewee will be and how that person's current job is specifically related to media/communication.**

**This assignment is due Saturday, June 11 by 5 p.m. Include the interview's name and contact information (phone or email).**

**Here are the criteria I will use to evaluate your Interview Paper assignment:**

1. Was the interview conducted with someone who has been in a media/communication position for at least three years and is currently working within the field? Does your paper include contact information for that individual? Did you notify the instructor of your interviewee by the June 3 deadline? (10 points possible)
2. Is your paper written and organized well, using correct grammar and spelling? Is it 1,000 to 2,000 words? (15 points possible)
3. Does the paper clearly describe the person's job description and duties and the overall types of ethical dilemmas they face? (15 points possible)
4. Does the paper clearly describe a specific media/communication ethical dilemma the person faced, their decision-making process, the outcome of the dilemma, and what (if anything) they would have done differently? (30 points possible)
5. Does the paper clearly explain your thoughts about how the dilemma was handled within the context of what you learned in this class? (30 points possible)



## Class Participation (including attendance)

Class discussion is especially important because this is an ethics course where we examine complex issues that require thoughtful consideration. It's our opportunity to think deeply about issues and learn from others' experiences and points of view. This is where you can try out ideas and get feedback from me and your peers. Feel free to share your thoughts and opinions, even when they disagree with mine and with those of your classmates. Please be respectful in all of your comments.



I will record each class, but only for grading purposes. Because of the sensitive nature of some of our topics and to encourage candid discussion, I will not post these recordings or share them with anyone.

Monday through Thursday of each week, we'll have class discussion during our regular 1:15-2:45 p.m. EST time. On Fridays, we'll have asynchronous discussion through the Discussion Board. I'll post one or two prompts each Friday. For each prompt, you should do at least one substantial post responding to my prompt and at least one substantial post in response to a classmate's post. The Discussion Board will be open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day. Posts made outside of that timeframe will not be counted for grading purposes.

**Your class participation grade will be determined by:** (1) your attendance, (2) the degree to which you prepare for class by reading/watching/listening to the assigned material, (3) the amount you actively participate in class, (4) the degree to which you attempt to dominate discussion when others are trying to participate, and (5) how often you use electronic devices during class for non-class-related purposes.

You'll get a grade for every two-day (Monday/Tuesday and Wednesday/Thursday) synchronous time block, and for Friday's asynchronous use of the Discussion Board. The average of those grades will be your final Discussion Board grade, which counts for 20 percent of your final course grade. **I will drop your lowest Discussion Board grade.**

For our synchronous classes, you'll grade your participation. At the end of each two-day synchronous time block, you are required to submit a form to the instructor that summarizes your participation for the time block. You can earn up to 100 participation points per two-day time block.

Why am I having you grade your own live class participation? Mainly because I can't possibly record all of that information for 20 of you each class period! But it's also so that you pay more attention to the expectations, my reasons for them, and how they are designed to benefit the class. It's so you think of them all semester and not just at the end when you're trying to cram five weeks of participation into three days.

**Participation points are awarded based on these criteria:**

1. How much of the two class periods were you present for (a total of 3 hours and 30 minutes)?

All (20 points)

Between two-thirds and all (16 points)

Between half and two-thirds (11 points)

Some, but less than half (5 points)

None (0 points) (If “none” is your answer, you won’t get any points at all for the time block because you will have missed both class periods.)

2. Did you read/watch/listen to the assigned material for the two class periods?

Yes, all of it (20)

Yes, some of it (12)

No, none of it (0)

3. How many times during the two-day time block did you contribute to live class discussion by providing a substantial response to the instructor/a classmate or for asking a substantial question of the instructor/a classmate? (Substantial means more than “I agree” or “Could you please repeat what you said?”)

2 times or more (20)

1 time (12)

None (0)

4. During the two-period time block, did you use an electronic device in a way that was not specifically course related unless it was an emergency? (Examples of course-related activities are taking notes or looking something up online directly related to the class discussion.) (FOMO does not constitute an emergency, although I know that it sometimes feels that way.)

No (20)

Yes, but only for 5 minutes or less (12)

Yes, for more than 5 minutes (0)

5. During the class periods, did you continue to raise your hand and/or speak out in class after you had already fulfilled your-two-substantial comment requirement and when others still had their hands raised?

No (20)

Yes, but in only one of the two class periods (10)

Yes, in both class periods (0)



**I will grade Friday's Asynchronous Discussion Board participation based on these criteria:**

100 points will be given for a student who has posted at least one substantial response to each of the original prompts and at least one substantial response to a classmate's post for each of the original prompts. Comments are thorough and thoughtful and reflect an understanding of the assigned material. They contribute original information and go beyond simply agreeing or disagreeing with others' comments. Opinions are backed up with evidence and/or discussion of personal experience.

90 points will be given for a student who has posted at least one substantial response to each of the original prompts and at least one substantial response to a classmate's post for each of the original prompts. Comments are thorough and thoughtful, reflect an understanding of the assigned material, and go beyond simply agreeing or disagreeing with others' comments.

A grade of 75 will be given for a student who has posted at least once to each of the original prompts and at least once to a classmate's post for each of the original prompts. This is the grade given if comments less than substantial (very brief).

A grade of 50 will be given to a student who has posted at least once but less than the required number.

A grade of 0 will be given to a student who does not post at all on that Friday.

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**About the nature of the content in this course**

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 occasionally step away from class because of the disturbing nature of course content, you may do so without penalty. Please contact me after class so that I know to adjust your participation grade. You still are responsible for any material covered during time that you miss, and you should arrange 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 resources and services to help you cope with any difficult challenges you face while part of the Carolina community and beyond.

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**University Approved Absence Request**

Some absences are automatically excused by the university, and you can [read about those here](#). To be excused for other absences that fall outside of that list, you may submit a [university approved absence request here](#).

## About UNC's Honor Code

You need to know and follow UNC's policies regarding academic honesty in this class. I will enforce all these rules.

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

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

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## General guidelines for behavior in this class

- Be respectful of others' opinions, even when you disagree with them. Given the nature of this class, we will certainly face issues and proposed solutions we disagree about. That's healthy, as long as we remain calm and open-minded. It's important to consider different viewpoints, and I will often play "devil's advocate" in this class to encourage consideration of multiple points of view. You will never be penalized for your opinions if they are shared in a manner that is considerate of others.
- Take your Friday Discussion Board responsibilities seriously. Do not wait until the last minute to do your required posts. Participate in discussion throughout the day so that your classmates can benefit from your knowledge and experience, and you can benefit from theirs. Treat people kindly on the Discussion Board, even when you disagree with them. You can even post pet photos or other items designed to make us smile.
- If you are experiencing any difficulty or concerns in class, please let me know right away. We can discuss the situation and work to improve it. It makes all the difference in the world if you address issues sooner rather than later – even if putting it off is your initial reaction.

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## Professional values and competencies

The School of Journalism and Media'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>. 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 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.

# Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Assignments
Wednesday, May 11	Welcome to our FDOC!  Introduction to the course and the study of media ethics	Read the syllabus (carefully, please)
Thursday, May 12	An introduction to ethical decision-making and how to read and analyze a case study	MEIC Chapter 1, pages 1-25
Friday, May 13  <b>Asynchronous class session</b>  Discussion Board open from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST	Information/news ethics  Case Study: Don't tweet ill of the dead  <b>Note: Class participation grading starts today</b>  (I do the grading for asynchronous Fridays. You will grade yourselves for the Monday/Tuesday and Wednesday/Thursday time blocks.)	MEIC Chapter 2, pages 29-49  <a href="#">Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics</a>  <a href="#">RTDNA Social Media &amp; Blogging Guidelines</a>  Case Study 2-B, pages 53-55  <a href="#">Washingtonian news story about this case and the Washington Post's social media policy</a>
Monday, May 16	Information/News Ethics  The issue of objectivity  Case Study: When is objective reporting irresponsible reporting?  <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Ana Balbuena Salazar</a>	Case Study 2-F, pages 63-65  <a href="#">The lost meaning of 'objectivity'</a>  <a href="#">Poynter column: It's time for journalism educators to rethink 'objectivity' and teach more about context</a>  <a href="#">A reckoning over objectivity, led by Black journalists</a>  <a href="#">5 questions reporters and editors should ask to diversify their sources</a>
Tuesday, May 17	Information/News Ethics  The issue of transparency  Case Study: Who's the predator?  <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Connor Bono</a>	<a href="#">Who's the predator?</a>  <a href="#">RTDNA guidelines for hidden cameras</a>  <b>Turn in Monday/Tuesday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.</b>

<p>Wednesday, May 18</p>	<p>Privacy</p> <p>The issue of unpublishing</p> <p>Case Study: Guilt by Google: Unpublishing and crime reporting in the digital age</p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Andrea Wang</a></p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 3, pages 67-81</p> <p>Case Study 3-B, pages 84-87</p>
<p>Thursday, May 19</p>	<p>Mass media in a democratic society</p> <p>Case Study: A second draft of history: The New York Times' 1619 project</p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Ziyang Nie</a></p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Lali Dekanoidze</a></p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 5, pages 131-149</p> <p>Case Study 5-B, pages 155-157</p> <p>Turn in Wednesday/Thursday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.</p>
<p>Friday, May 20</p> <p><b>Asynchronous class session</b></p> <p>Discussion Board open from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST</p>	<p>Informing a just society</p> <p>Case Study: Cincinnati Enquirer's Heroin Beat</p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 6, pages 173-186</p> <p>Case Study 6-E, pages 199-202</p>
<p>Monday, May 23</p>	<p>Informing a just society</p> <p>Case Study: Journalism and activism? When identity becomes political</p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Olivia Fults</a></p>	<p>Case Study 6-B, pages 190-193</p>
<p>Tuesday, May 24</p>	<p>Loyalty: Choosing among competing allegiances</p> <p>Case Study: To watch or to report: What journalists were thinking in the midst of disaster</p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Marcus Clark</a></p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 4, pages 99-112</p> <p>Case Study 4-B, pages 116-117</p> <p>Turn in Monday/Tuesday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.</p>
<p>Wednesday, May 25</p>	<p>Strategic communication: Does client advocate mean consumer adversary?</p> <p>Public Relations Ethics</p> <p>Case Study: Quit, blow the whistle, or go with the flow</p> <p><a href="#">Ethics in the News: Keyan Li</a></p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 7, pages 207-223</p> <p><a href="#">Institute for Public Relations overview of PR ethics</a></p> <p><a href="#">PRSA Ethics Code</a></p> <p>Case Study 4-F, pages 126-130</p>

Thursday, May 26	Public Relations/Marketing: Influencers Case Study: Fyre Festival becomes Fyre fraud <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Anna Jang</a> <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Samantha Driscoll</a>	Case Study 7-A, pages 223-225 <a href="#">PRSA: The power of influencer marketing</a> <a href="#">Disclosures 101 for social media influencers from the Federal Trade Commission</a> <a href="#">Influencer marketing has some serious ethical issues</a> Turn in Wednesday/Thursday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.
Friday, May 27 <b>Asynchronous class session</b> Discussion Board open from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST	Public Relations Case Study: Facebook & Burson-Marsteller “smear Google” campaign	<a href="#">Facebook &amp; Burson-Marsteller “smear Google” campaign</a>
Monday, May 30	Memorial Day Holiday	Relax and be well
Tuesday, May 31	Public Relations Case Study: The Shared Values Initiative <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Tiana Pavia</a>	<a href="#">Wikipedia explanation of the Shared Values Initiative</a> <a href="#">A critique of Shared Values</a> <a href="#">One of the Shared Values videos</a> Turn in Monday/Tuesday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m. (Give yourself full credit for Monday.)
Wednesday, June 1	Advertising ethics Case Study: Through the glass darkly: Peloton, body shaming, and America’s odd relationship with exercise <a href="#">Ethics in the News: Conor Newby</a>	<a href="#">Institute for Advertising Ethics Principles</a> Case Study 7-B, pages 226-227
Thursday, June 2	Advertising/marketing: Product placement	Case Study 7-F, pages 235-238

	<p>Case Study: Was that an Apple computer I saw? Product placement in the United States and Abroad</p> <p>More about Peloton: Backlash to Peloton's Sex and the City ad speaks volumes</p> <p>Ethics in the News: <a href="#">Caroline Norland</a></p> <p>Ethics in the News: <a href="#">Richard Perez</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Backlash to Peloton's Sex and the City ad speaks volumes</a></p> <p><a href="#">American Marketing Association Code of Ethics</a></p> <p>Turn in Wednesday/Thursday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.</p>
<p>Friday, June 3</p> <p><b>Asynchronous class session</b></p> <p>Discussion Board open from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST</p>	<p>Disability representation in advertising</p>	<p><a href="#">Disability in ads: Celebration or commodification?</a></p> <p><a href="#">Nike's erasure of disability: The marketing mishaps of the Go FlyEase</a></p>
<p>Monday, June 6</p>	<p>Graphic topics in advertising</p> <p>Case Study: And the Oscar rejects ... Frida Mom</p> <p>Ethics in the News: <a href="#">Kaumudi Bonu</a></p>	<p>Case Study 9-C, pages 298-300</p>
<p>Tuesday, June 7</p>	<p>Native advertising and issues of transparency</p> <p>Ethics in the News: <a href="#">Devin Street</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Native advertising definition and examples</a></p> <p><a href="#">Federal Trade Commission's Guide for Businesses on Native Advertising</a></p> <p><a href="#">American Marketing Association: 6 ways to make your native advertising more ethical</a></p> <p>Turn in Monday/Tuesday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m. (Give yourself full credit for Monday.)</p>
<p>Wednesday, June 8</p>	<p>Picture this: Technology, visual information, and evolving standards</p> <p>Case Study: Remember my fame: Digital necromancy and the immortal celebrity</p> <p>Ethics in the News: <a href="#">Sifan Tao</a></p>	<p><a href="#">NPPA Code of Ethics</a></p> <p>MEIC Chapter 8, pages 239-252</p> <p>Case Study 8-C, pages 258-259</p>

<p>Thursday, June 9</p>	<p>Handling disturbing images</p> <p>Case Study: Above the fold: Balancing newsworthy photos with community standards</p> <p>Ethics in the News: Claire Tynan</p> <p>Ethics in the News: Catherine Vanschaick</p>	<p>Case Study 8-E, pages 262-268</p> <p><i>Note: This case study contains two disturbing images in black and white photos</i></p> <p><a href="#">11 questions to ask before sharing graphic photos, video</a></p> <p>Turn in Wednesday/Thursday participation self-assessment by 10 p.m.</p>
<p>Friday, June 10</p> <p><b>Asynchronous class session</b></p> <p>Discussion Board open from 6 a.m. – 9 p.m. EST</p>	<p>Going too far? The ethics of visually representing diversity</p> <p>Discussion of the final exam: What’s on it, the format, and how to prepare for it</p>	<p><a href="#">Doctoring diversity: Race and Photoshop</a></p> <p><a href="#">Best practices for inclusive and diverse photography in higher education</a></p>
<p>Monday, June 13</p>	<p>LDOC: Becoming a moral adult</p> <p>Discussion of what you learned from your interview assignment</p> <p>Ethics in the News: Fernand Vazquez Huggins</p>	<p>MEIC Chapter 11, pages 349-361</p>
<p>Thursday, June 16</p>	<p><b>Final Exam 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. EST</b></p> <p>(You must take the exam on this day. It will not be given early.)</p>	