

# MEJO 141 Media Ethics

**Instructor:** LaRisa Anderson

**Classroom:** Carroll Hall – Rm 0058

**Time:** Tues and Thurs from 11am – 12:15pm

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays from 12:15pm – 2:00pm or by appointment (in-person or via Zoom)\*

*\* The best way to communicate with me outside of class is via email or office hours. Bring any questions about course material (or life). Other topics I'm always down to discuss include: the latest Netflix show I'm watching, album or song I have on repeat, the next place I hope to travel to, and all things food related. \**

What is ethics? Why is it necessary for our professional careers?  
I'm glad you asked...



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## **Course Overview**

We are here to learn about the relationships between 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. Acting ethically requires carefully thinking through professional dilemmas, deciding on the best course of action, justifying decisions to stakeholders, and being held accountable for courses of action. Unlike moral dilemmas where we would debate “right” and “wrong”, ethical decision-making involves rationally justified decisions. (In other words, we are making decisions about what “should” be done.) This course uses current events and media cases for students to apply the ethical models found in course materials.

## **Course Objectives**

The purpose of this course is to help you make effective ethical decisions within your profession. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Identify professional ethical dilemmas and apply major ethical frameworks
2. Build industry level critical thinking skills by analyzing current media professional practices
3. Compare and contrast ethical standards and codes across related media professions
4. Evaluate your approach to ethical decision through reading, writing, and discussing communication topics and current events

## **Classroom Etiquette**

In this ethics course we will focus on real cases in media to make the course as relevant as possible. Some issues may be more controversial than others, but it is important to remember that our class will create space for everyone’s thoughts and feelings to be validated. Before the first day of class, ask yourself: Am I willing to create a space for everyone to feel comfortable speaking up even if I disagree?

Here are a few things we can do to maintain a safe environment:

1. Listen first. You may have a lot of things to say in response to one of your peers. This is a sign that your brain is stimulated and you are critically engaging these ethical-dilemmas. Good job! Let’s do our best to assume positive intent amongst our colleagues in the classroom and listen carefully to their perspective.
2. Articulate your opinion without attacking the opposing side. You may find yourself making moral decisions about what is “right” or “wrong” in the

classroom. This is a sign that you are applying these ethical dilemmas to your personal values. Good job! Let's do our best to state our perspectives as a response to the *issue* and not a clapback to a student. In fact, this may be a great opportunity for you to challenge your own perspectives as college students. Show empathy, think deeply, and speak with confidence knowing your colleagues in the classroom value your opinion.

If you ever feel uncomfortable in class or with a particular discussion and need to take a step away, please do! You never have to apologize for making your mental health a priority in this classroom. Step out for a second and return when you are ready. (No need to tell me why...I trust you!)

On that same note, please do not hesitate to access on campus resources if you find yourself in need:

- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(aka, CAPS\)](#) – Go to website or visit the third floor of Campus Health Services building for walk-in appointments.
- [CAPS Multicultural Health Program](#) for Black, Indigenous, and students of color
- [Community Clinic](#), UNC Department of Psychology in-person and teletherapy services
- [Student Care Hub ask a question](#)
- [Carolina Cupboard](#) on-campus food pantry

## **Course Policies and Standards**

### ***Attendance***

Please be here! I consider this classroom a professional environment: your classmates are your colleagues. Let's all do our best to be present and ready to learn each day. This is primarily a discussion-based class and is designed as an in-person class. Therefore, it is imperative that you are here and that you are engaged with the content. In addition to class twice a week, I expect everyone to be active participants in the class and small group discussions—ask questions, offer your opinions, and challenge. I think you'll find it makes learning easier and more fun. Yes, it's a large class, but we can make the community interactive and ethical decision-making more effective through dialogue.

Attendance will be taken each day in class. Please note that you are responsible for any material covered during classes, and an absence on a due date does not justify a late assignment. Also, you will lose credit for any in-class assignment completed during classes you do not attend unless you have a university approved absence.

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these [University Approved Absences](#). For university approved absences, please communicate with me as early as possible. Please be aware that you are bound by the Honor Code when making a request for a University Approved Absence. University Approved Absences include: authorized University activities, Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC). Also, significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

### ***Class Participation***

We are going to cover several real cases in this course that I hope are engaging and helpful for your professional career, but this requires lively class discussion! In addition to attending class twice a week, I expect everyone to be active participants in the classroom. Your participation grade is in part determined by class attendance, in-class small group reflections, and your verbal participation. Here are criteria I follow for determining the participation portion of your grade:

<b>A (9-10)</b>	<b>B (7-8)</b>	<b>C (5-6)</b>	<b>D and F (&lt;4)</b>
Consistently participates in class through small group reflections or class discussion on readings. No unexcused absences.	Occasionally participates in small-group reflections or class discussion. No unexcused absences.	Rarely participates in class and hardly completes small-group reflections. Poor attendance and/or occasionally late.	Does not contribute to class discussion or small group reflections at all.

### ***Grades***

A	93-100%	C+	77-79%	F	Below 64%
A-	90-92%	C	73-76%		
B+	87-89%	C-	70-72%		
B	83-86%	D+	67-69%		
B-	80-82%	D	64-66%		

### ***Grade Breakdown***

<b>Participation</b>		10% of final grade
Sakai Quiz	10 pts	
In-Class Reflection	10 pts	
<b>Homework</b>		40% of final grade
Ethical Reflection	40 pts	
Sakai Reflection #1	10 pts	
Sakai Reflection #2	10 pts	
Sakai Reflection #3	10 pts	
Sakai Reflection #4	10 pts	
<b>Final Presentation</b>	100 pts	50% of final grade
<b>Total</b>	200 pts	

### ***Extra points***

It's unlikely you will receive extra credit opportunities in this course. In the rare event that they occur, they will be class wide, so please don't ask for individual extra credit assignments.

### ***Late Work***

Late reflection assignments will receive a reduced grade unless you and I agree before the assignment is due that there are special circumstances. No assignment will be accepted if it is turned in more than 24 hours after its deadline.

### ***Academic Rigor Expectations***

As future professionals and junior scholars, I expect you to conduct yourself accordingly. Our classroom will be a space of learning and healthy discussion. Beyond the classroom, I expect all students to approach myself and each other with respect. All written assignments and presentations will be scrutinized for their vernacular and presentation. Assignment submissions must be grammatically correct and free from spelling errors. Please submit all assignments in Word (or an equivalent) using APA citations. If you need assistance with references, consult the library's citation guide (<https://guides.lib.unc.edu/citing-information>). All email correspondence should include a subject (i.e., Question About Reflection Paper), a greeting (i.e., Hi Prof. Anderson), and a salutation (i.e., Best Regards or Thank you).

### ***Honor Code***

I expect that each student will conduct themselves 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.

### ***Title IX***

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

### ***Policy on Non-Discrimination***

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. The University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you may seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu)), the EOC office, or online to EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

### ***Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve. (Seriously!) I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement 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, ethnicity, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender

identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or 919/966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

### ***Accessibility 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/>

### ***Professional Values and Competencies***

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

Students taking this course will be able to think critically, creatively, and independently, learn how to conduct research and evaluate information, write correctly and clearly, and critically evaluate their own work and that of others.

### ***Sakai/Email***

Other than this syllabus, important information can be found on Sakai and will also be emailed to you. **Updates will be frequent, so check the announcements section of Sakai often and your email for important course information.** You are responsible for any course changes that may be made on Sakai or via email, including changes to the syllabus or assignments. Your grades are posted in Sakai only so that you can stay updated on your progress; overall grades on Sakai are rough approximations of your overall grade in the course.

### ***Note-Taking***

Please do not scroll on social media or do your weekly shopping in class out of respect for me and your classmates. If electronic devices become an issue, the entire class may be affected by a course policy change.

### ***Remote Work***

If we are required to operate remotely for any reason, our course structure will remain the same. The attendance policy will apply, and breakout rooms will operate as our small group discussion time.



## **Course Materials**

In this class we will draw from several books, articles, podcasts, and videos to develop a broad and diverse sense of who has contributed to media ethics theorization. The end of the syllabus features a bibliography of assigned texts. You are not required to purchase any texts. All reading materials will be available in PDF form on Sakai. However, if you would like to read beyond the assigned chapters or use these materials for reference in other classes, the book list on page 12 identifies which texts are available through the UNC library. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings in advance of class sessions to ensure you are ready to discuss, ask questions, and offer opinions. This is what will make this class fun and relevant for your career but also your life outside of industry. I will do my part to make things as exciting as possible, but I need your cooperation to make this class the BEST!

*\*The course material will be helpful for this class, but also for your professional career. Please consider purchasing one of these books in the future to guide your ethical development beyond this course\**

## **Course Assignments**

### ***Sakai Reading Quiz***

This 10-question reading quiz is due 1/26 by 5pm. The questions are based on assigned readings and course discussions.

### ***Ethical Reflection Paper***

The ethical reflection paper is a chance for you to reflect on concepts we have discussed in class and your own ethical process. You can find the document on Sakai in the assignments tab. The rubric for grading is also attached. This assignment is due on 2/23 by 11am.

### ***Sakai Reflections***

In the second half of the course, we will focus on industry-specific ethical dilemmas. These are accompanied by an ethical reflection question. Each response should be between 300-500 words and uploaded to Sakai assignments in a Word document using APA citation style as needed.

### ***Final Presentation***

In this course you will produce a final presentation involving independent research. The instructions for this assignment are listed on Sakai along with the rubric for your grading. You will be asked to identify a job opening that interests you, research their company values, analyze how they have handled ethical dilemmas in the past, and generate an interview question you might ask if you went on this job



interview. We will discuss this further in class. Below are a few tips to keep in mind throughout the semester, but especially for researching ethical dilemmas for the final:

- Utilize the resources provided by our Park Library staff:  
<https://guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo141>
- Develop your own news-seeking habits with publications. Here are some examples:
  - <https://www.axios.com>
  - <https://www.npr.org>
  - <https://www.usnews.com/topics/subjects/ethics>
  - <https://www.theskimm.com>

Please note, this is a big class so the final presentations will span three days. You will provide feedback for your classmates and in turn receive comments from at least five of your peers. Attendance is mandatory to receive full points for the final.

### **Tentative Course Schedule**

I'm eager to share the course breakdown with you! Please be advised that the schedule may be changed, or syllabus altered if necessary. All revisions will be discussed in class and a revised syllabus will be uploaded to Sakai as needed.

#### **Week 1 – Terminology and Introduction to Ethics**

- Tues. 1/10
  - Welcome! Overview of course/structure.
- Thur. 1/12
  - Reading: Patterson et al. (2018) Chapter 1

#### **Week 2 –Terminology/History of Media Ethics**

- Tues. 1/17
  - Reading: Freeman and McClennon (2021) Preface;  
Christians et al. (2011) Ethical Foundations and Perspectives
- Thur. 1/19
  - Reading: Ferré (2020) A Short History Media Ethics in the US;  
History of Media Literacy (Crash Course YT)

#### **Week 3 – Moral Philosophy**

- Tues. 1/24
  - Reading: The Ethics Center (2018) Moral Absolutism;  
Dean (2021) Moral Relativism; Metaethics Crash Course (2016)
- Thur. 1/26

- Reading: Philosophize This! (2014) Episode #031...Pascal's Wager; BBC Reel (2022) What can we learn from the African philosophy of Ubuntu?
- Online Reading Comprehension Quiz due today

#### Week 4 – Ethical Frameworks

- Tues. 1/31 – Virtue, Duty, Consequentialist
  - Reading: Philosophy Bites (2014) – What is virtue ethics for?
- Thur. 2/2 – Justice, Care, Trust
  - Reading: Patterson et al. (2018) Chapter 9

#### Week 5 – Moral Development and Empathy

- Tues. 2/7
  - Reading: Patterson et al. (2018) Chapter 11
- Thur. 2/9
  - Reading: Vozzola & Senland (2022) Chapter 11

#### Week 6 – Codes of Ethics and Professionalism

- Tues. 2/14
  - Reading: SPJ Code of Ethics ([link](#)), RTDNA Code of Ethics ([link](#)), PRSA Code of Ethics ([link](#)), IABC Code of Ethics ([link](#)), IAC Code of Ethics ([link](#))
- Thur. 2/16
  - Reading: TED Talk - Resisting the Myths of Professionalism (2021); TED Talk - (Be)coming Professional (2021)

#### Week 7 – Truth

- Tues. 2/21
  - Well-Being Day/Valentine's Day – No classes held!
- Thur. 2/23
  - Reading: Ward (2020) Truth and Objectivity
  - Homework due by 11am – Ethical Reflection

#### Week 8 – Objectivity, Neutrality, and Loyalty

- Tues. 2/28
  - Reading: NPR Code Switch (2016) What does objectivity mean to journalists of color?
- Thur. 3/2
  - Reading: Pinsker (2020) Why grocery stores have tiny kid-sized carts; CNBC (2019) The Rise of Chik-Fil-A

### Week 9 – Transparency

- Tues. 3/7
  - Reading: Heim & Craft (2020) Transparency in journalism
- Thur. 3/9
  - Reading: None – Group Exercise & In-class Reflection

Week 10 – SPRING BREAK! Read nothing, eat everything, and drink lots of water!

### Week 11—Persuasion and Privacy

- Tues. 3/21
  - Reading: Baker (2020) The Ethics of Advocacy
- Thur. 3/23
  - Reading: Wilkins & Patterson (2020) Toward an institution-based theory of privacy

### Week 12 – Ethics and the Internet

- Tues. 3/28
  - Reading: Noble (2016) Challenging the algorithms of oppression
- Thur. 3/30
  - Reading: Danny in the Valley (2021) Timnit Gebru: “Google’s ethical AI fig leaves”
  - Homework due Sun. 4/2 11:55pm: short-Sakai reflection

### Week 13 – Ethics and Marketing

- Tues. 4/4
  - Reading: iProv (2021) Mad Men - Lipstick Pitch | Ad Exec Reacts;
  - Sign-up for final presentation opens on 3/31!
- Thur. 4/6
  - Reading: Holt (2014) Bump Tracker: Nine Months of Big Data; PBS News Hour (2014) What do data brokers really know about us?
  - Homework due Sun. 4/9 11:55pm: short-Sakai reflection

### Week 14 – Ethics and Advertising

- Tues. 4/11
  - Reading: WatchMojo (2019) Top 10 Controversial Commercials That Didn’t Get Banned; Jones (2022) Balenciaga’s controversial new campaign and the long history of ‘shockvertising’
- Thur. 4/13

- Well-Being Day! No classes held.

#### Week 15 – Ethics and Public Relations

- Tues. 4/18
  - Reading: McCorkindale (2021) Research Readout: Critical Race Theory Has a Role to Play in Business Communications and PR; Martin & Wright (2015) Is public relations inherently unethical?
- Thur. 4/20
  - Reading: TBD; guest lecture (Livia Freeman)
  - Homework due Sun. 4/23 11:55pm: short-Sakai reflection

#### Week 16 – Ethics and Journalism

- Tues. 4/25
  - Reading: Madhira and Stack (2018) - Why student journalists should be protected from censorship; Kolker (2004) The Bad Superintendent
  - Final Presentation Day 1
- Thur. 4/27 - LDOC
  - Final Presentation Day 2
  - Homework due Sun. 4/27 11:55pm: short-Sakai reflection

Final Presentation Day 3: **Friday, May 5 from 12-3pm** [subject to change]

*\*\*Take a break. Call your person. Eat good food. Spend your money on things you enjoy. Listen to music that makes you want to dance. Rest\*\**

### Book List

- Christians, C. G. (Ed.). (2012). *Media ethics: Cases and moral reasoning* (9th ed). Allyn & Bacon. \*
- Freeman, S. T., & McClennon, L. (2021). *Ethics Seen Through the Lens of the Black American Experience: How Does It Look?* All American Small Business Exporters Association (AABEA).
- Martin, D. & Wright, D. K. (2016). *Public Relations Ethics: How To Practice PR Without Losing Your Soul*. Business Expert Press
- Patterson, P., Wilkins, L., & Painter, C. (2018). *Media ethics: Issues and cases*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. \*
- Wilkins, L., & Christians, C. G. (Eds.). (2020). *The Routledge handbook of mass media ethics* (Second edition). Routledge. \*
- Vozzola, E.C., & Senland, A.K. (2022). *Moral Development: Theory and Applications* (Second edition). Routledge. \*

\*identifies books available through the UNC library in e-book form.