

Welcome to MEJO 141: Media Ethics!

Instructor: Paige Ladisic

Meeting Times: 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., Mondays and Wednesdays

Classroom: Curtis Media Center, Room 201/202

Email: ladisic@email.unc.edu

Phone: 910-448-2003 (this is my cell; texting is encouraged!)

Office hours and location: By appointment only – using [my Calendly link](#)

Final Exam: Friday, December 15 at 12 p.m.

Note: As 379 is a required course for MEJO students, a grade of at least a “C” is required to avoid needing to retake the course.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is about tools, not answers. Throughout this semester, we’ll be looking at the ways professionals think about and navigate the ethics of their work, why they’re needed, and the processes by which ethical decisions are made. We’ll take a look at the foundations and philosophical principles behind them and work through the model of ethical decisionmaking.

Each class session will explore theories, themes and tools that are relevant to media ethics. It won’t cover everything – that would take a lifetime. But it should help you improve your conceptual grasp of media ethics and its importance in today’s media landscape.

Prerequisites and Gen Ed Requirements

Actually, there are none. This course is required for all MEJO majors and meets the Gen Ed requirements for the philosophical and moral reasoning.

What does that mean? Each student in this course will be required to complete a minimum of 10 pages of writing. We’ll get into that more in the schedule further down.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this class is to help you make effective ethical decisions within your profession. Course objectives include:

1. What goes into making an ethical decision? Explore ethical foundations to apply in professional ethical dilemmas;
2. The value of having a process: Applying ethical codes and standards of our professions to resolve ethical dilemmas;

3. Critically analyze ethical expectations and challenges in our professions through reading, writing and discussing communication topics found in news outlets, trade journals and other media.

CONTENT WARNING

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 step out of class, you may do so without penalty. However, 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 a number of resources and services to help you cope with any difficult challenges you face while part of the Carolina community and beyond.

TEXTBOOK

➡ *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases* by Lee Wilkins, Chad Painter, & Philip Patterson, 10th ed.

Additional readings will be posted on Canvas in that week's module.

Completing readings **before class** is necessary to be a good participant in class. If a reading is assigned to a particular class, that means we will be asking questions, discussing, disagreeing, and exploring that reading deeper.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

- **Make good decisions:** You're an adult, and you can decide to come to class (or not). I won't "dock" your overall grade for missing class. However, unexcused absences will stack up and impact your overall participation grade – do not expect an A in participation if you are frequently absent (more than 3 absences).
- **Signing In:** A sign-in sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class to mark your attendance. Do not sign in for your classmates if they are not present. If you are tardy, come to me after class to sign in.
- **Missed work:** You cannot make up any in-class assignments unless you arrange with me more than 24 hours in advance.

Participation

- **Participation Matters:** In addition to attending class twice a week, I expect everyone to be active participants 1) in class, 2) in small-group discussions and 3) on Canvas forums – ask questions, offer your opinions, and challenge. Yes, it's a large class, but interaction makes ethical decision-making more effective through dialogue (not to mention less boring!).
- Here are the criteria I follow for determining the participation portion of your grade. I'll also ask you to assess yourself via these same criteria at the end of the semester.

9-10 points	7-8 points	5-6 points	4 or fewer points
Consistently participates in class and/or on forums twice a week. Thought provoking ideas, asks/posts interesting questions. On time. No unexcused absences.	Participates in class and/or on forums twice a week consistently through semester. Good ideas, asks/posts questions. On time, no unexcused absences.	Participates in class and/or on forums time to time. Mostly prefers to lurk. Pretty good input but doesn't speak up in team or class discussions or contribute on forums consistently. Fewer than 3 unexcused absences.	Barely says anything all semester whether in class or on Canvas Forums. Mostly lurkers even if has good attendance. May or may not be on time. May have more than 3 unexcused absences.

Communication

- **Contact information:** Email me at ladisic@email.unc.edu with *non-urgent needs*. If you have an *urgent* need (or just want a faster response time!) please send me a text at 910-448-2003. This is the best way to get in touch with me.
- **Office hours:** By appointment only. Send me a text in order to set up an office hour appointment.
- **Class updates:** I will use Canvas and email to communicate changes and updates to the entire class. Assignments, due dates and lecture plans are always subject to change.

Assignments and Grading Policies

- **Submission guidelines:** Work should be submitted in PDF form on Canvas or, if Canvas is not cooperating, via email. Any other specifications will be included on an individual assignment.
- **Due dates:** All homework assignments are due at the beginning of the designated class period, unless otherwise indicated.
- **In-class assignments** are just that – you'll work on them in class and turn them in when class ends. Missing an in-class assignment constitutes a zero for that item unless you and I have determined in advance that you can make it up.

- **Work quality:** All assignments should be submitted as if a *paying client* (or your editor!) was going to see them. I will take points off for work that is sloppy or contains careless formatting, spelling, grammar or AP style errors.
- **Late work:** Late assignments will lose 10% right off the bat, with an additional 2% subtracted for every additional day it is late. HOWEVER, it is better to be late than to earn a 0!
- **Grading:** Your grade is subjective to my expectations and standards. My expectations are high, and I expect you to think critically and go above and beyond. If you did not produce excellent work, you will not receive an A.
- **Grade concerns and questions:** If you have concerns about a grade, please inform me via email. I ask that you wait 24 hours after receiving your grade. Please outline your concerns and provide evidence to support your claim. NOTE: I do not discuss grades over email. So, after you contact me about a grade I will set-up a time to meet with me in person (online or by phone) so we can discuss the grade.
- **Extra credit:** It's unlikely you will receive any extra credit opportunities in this course. In the rare and unlikely event that they occur, they will be class-wide, so please don't ask for individual extra credit assignments.

Grading Scale

PERCENT	GRADE	DESCRIPTION
93-100	A	Outstanding. Mastery attainment.
90-92.99	A-	
88-89.99	B+	
83-87.99	B	Strong performance; Solid attainment
80-82.99	B-	
78-79.99	C+	Average performance; Basic attainment of the subject has been demonstrated
73-77.99	C	
70-72.99	C-	
68-69.99	D+	
60-67.99	D	Passing performance; Marginal attainment
<59.99	F	Failed performance; Unacceptable attainment

Note: I do not round up.

ASSIGNMENTS

Here's what to expect:

- **Homework:** There are several homework assignments throughout the semester. You'll find them in Canvas on the Assignments tab and linked to the corresponding modules. Homework is due at the start of class (11 a.m.).
- **Weekly forum posts:** We'll have a weekly prompt on Canvas for you to share your perspectives by applying the concepts we're discussing in class. You're required to post once a week, minimum; more frequently is encouraged. Posts count as participation along with your involvement during each class period (small groups and full class). You will receive a weekly forum grade.
- **In-class activities:** Periodically throughout the semester, we'll do an in-class activity – sometimes in small groups, sometimes independently. They will be posted in the Assignments tab and available the day of that activity. Sometimes, I will let you know in advance; other times, I will not. These cannot be made up unless you are missing class for a university-excused absence or have cleared your absence with me **in advance**.
- **Participation:** Your participation grade will be based on your overall participation and engagement in the course. Not wild about talking in class? That's OK – the Canvas forums are a great place for you to shine.
- **Reading quizzes:** There will be **five** reading quizzes (multiple choice and T/F), each worth 20 points. I will drop the lowest quiz grade.
- **TARES group project:** You will work with a team (at least 1 other person) to assess a political or issue-based ad using the TARES test to rate its truthfulness, authenticity, respectfulness, equity, and social responsibility. Details will be posted in the Assignments tab.
- **Exams:** Test 1, Test 2, and your final will include multiple choice, matching, true/false, short answer and brief chats. I will post study guides in Canvas about a week before each one.

See the week-by-week schedule below for assignment due dates and test dates.

Your final grade in this class will be based on:

Homework and In-Class Activities (including weekly forum grades) <i>I will drop your lowest homework grade.</i>	15%
Participation <i>See above for participation grading scale.</i>	10%
Reading Quizzes <i>I will drop the lowest of your quizzes.</i>	10%

TARES group project	15%
Test 1	15%
Test 2	15%
Final Exam	20%
	100%

Hey, did you make it this far? Head over to the Week 1: Syllabus forum on Canvas and comment with a photo of your FAVORITE animal for a little extra credit. 🤠

IMPORTANT POLICIES TO KNOW

ARS

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu. (source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

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), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at 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. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy 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 can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office, or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

DIVERSITY

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; 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, 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.

ACCREDITATION

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication'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](#).

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. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note: this schedule is liable to change, but I will communicate all changes to you via Canvas/email.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC OF DISCUSSION	ASSIGNMENTS AND READINGS (complete BEFORE class)
1	Day 1 August 21	Welcome to MEJO 141! We'll go over my expectations for the semester and set the stage for why we talk about ethics. Intro discussion: What does it mean to be ethical in media today?	Read the syllabus!
	Day 2 August 23	What were they thinking? Let's get our feet wet and discuss some ethical situations.	Canvas readings: ▪ <i>PRSA New York condemns 5WPR CEO; and Everything PR Edelman blog post</i> (2 articles in 1 PDF) ▪ <i>Following criticism of Asian mail-order bride ad, newsweekly halts sponsored posts</i> ▪ <i>Reporter who quit Bloomberg News to date jailed 'Pharma Bro' Martin Shkreli talks journalism ethics</i> ▪ <i>The co-founder of Snopes wrote dozens of plagiarized articles for the fact-checking site</i> Due: Plagiarism Exercise
2	Day 3 August 28	The philosophers: Aristotle, Confucius, Kant, Mill, Bentham and beyond Let's get to know some of the old dead guys that much of what we know about ethical decision making are based on.	READ: Ch. 1, Media Ethics Canvas readings: ▪ <i>Philosophy (dead guys) highlights – read about Aristotle, Kant, Mill</i> ▪ <i>Ethical communication focus handout</i> Due: Dead Guys
	Day 4 August 30	Decision Making Techniques, Part 1 We'll talk over the Bok and Potter models and make sure we feel comfortable making decisions with those models.	READ: Media Ethics, p. 7-10 and p. 107-112 Canvas readings: ▪ <i>The veil of ignorance</i> ▪ <i>Step by step with Potter and Bok</i>
3	NO CLASS September 4	Labor Day	

	Day 5 September 6	Decision Making Techniques, Part 2 Encore! More decision making techniques.	
4	Day 6 September 11	Ethics and 9/11 Guest Speaker: Kate Sheppard, managing editor of <i>The Assembly</i>	<p>READ: There may be a reading assigned by the guest speaker – this will be on Canvas in advance.</p> <p>Due: Bok writing assignment</p> <p>Due at 11:59 p.m.: Reading Quiz 1 (Ch. 1, Bok and Potter readings, Canvas readings on Day 3-4)</p>
	Day 7 September 13	Moral development, starring Kohlberg and Gilligan Let's meet the moral development gurus and discuss how people develop morally and as ethical thinkers.	READ: Ch. 11, Media Ethics
5	Day 8 September 18	Discussion: Moral development	<p>Canvas readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>On a long-ago Christmas Eve, an editor understood what we were supposed to do</i> ▪ <i>Reporter is hit by car on air, striking nerve with TV journalists</i> ▪ <i>PR agency foots Uber bills for New Yorkers skipping the subway after mass shooting</i> ▪ <i>Experience: I write fake news</i> <p>STUDY!!!</p>
	Day 9 September 20	Test 1	
6	NO CLASS September 25	Wellbeing Day	
	Day 10 September 27	Standpoint Theory Lecture on standpoint theory, DEI and social justice.	<p>Canvas readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Standpoint theory basics</i> ▪ <i>How Alexandra Bell is disrupting racism in journalism</i>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Implicit bias</i>
7	Day 11 October 2	Informing a Just Society We'll wrap up our discussion on standpoint theory, DEI and social justice.	READ: Ch. 6, Media Ethics Due at 11:59 p.m.: Reading Quiz 2 (Day 10+11 Canvas readings)
	Day 12 October 4	Persuading Is persuasion ethical? Or, when <i>isn't</i> it ethical?	Due: Wood's Four Questions READ: Ch. 7, Media Ethics Canvas readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Unspun</i> chapters ▪ <i>Can ethical PRs represent unethical clients</i> ▪ <i>Verizon pulls misleading ads claiming its 5G service is 'necessary' for firefighters</i> ▪ <i>LIV Golf shines spotlight on 'sportswashing' – the nascent term for an age-old strategy</i> Be ready to find examples of Unspun strategies in class!
8	Day 13 October 9	Guest Speaker: Richard Griffiths, CNN	
	Day 14 October 11	Persuading, Part 2 & TARES-ing We'll continue our conversation about persuasion and strategic communications, and we'll work on a TARES activity in class.	Be prepared to work on a TARES test in class.
9	Day 15 October 16	Professionalism and Ethics Codes	Canvas readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Characteristics of a profession</i> ▪ <i>Levi's exit adds fuel to employee activist fire; and A Levi's executive left the company after her tweets opposing pandemic school closures drew attention (2 in 1 PDF).</i> ▪ <i>Case 4-A Cuomo interviews Cuomo (pp. 113-114 in Media Ethics)</i> ▪ <i>About the public editor</i> Due: Ethics Code Scavenger Hunt

			Due at 11:59 p.m.: Reading Quiz 3 (Ch. 5, 7, Unspun chapters)
	Day 16 October 18	Mass Media's Role in a Democratic Society We'll talk about our roles as journalists in the media and in our profession.	READ: Media Ethics, Ch. 5 Due: TARES Team Project Basics due Enjoy your fall break!
10	Day 17 October 23	Guest Speaker and/or Test Prep	Study!!!
	Day 18 October 25	Test 2	
11	Day 19 October 30	Asynchronous Lesson - LOYALTY Paige is out - no class in person this week!	READ: Ch. 4, Media Ethics ▪ One person's tragedy, another person's prize ▪ Opinion: Your loyalties are your life Due: Whether to/how to run a tragic photo
	Day 20 November 1		
12	Day 21 November 6	Truth & Information Ethics	READ: Ch. 2, Media Ethics
	Day 22 November 8	WORK DAY Your TARES assessment is due tonight – we will work in class to finish these.	Due: TARES assessment
13	Day 23 November 13	Truth & Information Ethics, Part 2	Canvas readings: ▪ Truth continuum chart ▪ TV pundits praising Suleimani assassination neglect to disclose ties to arms industry ▪ Ethics in journalism and public relations: It's personal ▪ Exxon lobbyist caught on video talking about undermining Biden's climate push Due at 11:59 p.m.: Reading Quiz 4 (Ch. 2, 4)
	Day 24	Objectivity, Neutrality and Transparency	READ:

	November 15		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case 6-B Journalism and activism? When identity becomes political (pp. 190-192) ▪ Revisit ch. 2, pp. 26-31 <p>Canvas readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>False media balance</i> ▪ <i>Media bias alert: Reporting differs in incident with St. Louis couple, protesters</i> ▪ <i>Snake-handling Pentecostal pastor dies from snake bite</i> ▪ <i>Against objectivity</i>
14	Day 25	Privacy, Part 1	READ: Ch. 3, Media Ethics
	November 20		
	NO CLASS	Happy Thanksgiving!	
	November 22		
15	Day 26	Privacy, Part 2	<p>Canvas readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The sad story of the marine who saved President Ford from assassination</i>
	November 27		
	Day 27	Visuals & Photography	READ: Ch. 8, Media Ethics
	November 29		<p>Canvas readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Bills safety Damar Hamlin remains in critical condition after cardiac arrest on field</i> ▪ <i>Photoshop's impact on women</i>
16	Day 28	Technology (AI and beyond)	Canvas readings
	December 4		Due at 11:59 p.m: Reading Quiz 5 (Ch. 3, 8)
	Day 29	Class Wrapup	See you at the final!
	December 6		
FINALS	FINAL EXAM	December 15 at 12 p.m.	