Course Syllabus Digital Media Ethics 2017

This course involves case studies, discussion, and deliberation, as well as reading and listening to fundamentals of ethical thought. Moral philosophy is a basis for the exploration of issues, but also important are developed and developing cultural norms. We'll also consider how different standards can apply in different societies or communities. And the overwhelming role that technology and its abilities play in contemporary communication practice will be explored.

Throughout this unit, students will:

• Explore traditional ethical standards, and the different problems today with vast audiences and lack of regulation on the internet

• Discuss and deliberate on appropriate action when an online ethical problem arises

• Identify ethical dilemmas in journalism, public relations, activism and other mass mobilization practices via the internet

• Appreciate ethical challenges for journalists and other sources when posting material

• Explore the differences between visual, audio and written material when posting

• Make and justify decisions about ethical dilemmas

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By the end of the semester, students will be expected to have developed these skills:

▪critical understanding of ethics and their application to journalism and other communications professions

▪appreciation of differences between communication in the online and offline environments

▪knowledge and analysis of regulation of journalism/PR/video industries

▪awareness of current codes of behaviour for media professionals, and how these fit in the online environment

Sketch of our weekly content and explorations

1. Background and set-up: The **structure of cyberspace** – comparison with 'non-virtual' world in terms of personal interaction, collective intelligence, social mores. Historical difference from 'offline' scenarios and encounters. The rapid evolution of a digital world, and its implications for personal interactions and mass power.

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2. The questions we have to ask – especially after an election arguably won by a skilled twitter operator. Is social media dexterity now the key to power? Is there an acceptable language for online conversation? Are there limits to free speech online.

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3. Ethics in our history – that is, predominantly Anglo-Saxon/European moral philosophy and traditions of behaviour. How appropriate is this in a globalized world? What, if any, are the alternatives? Four key thinkers: Aristotle, Kant, Hobbes, Rawls. Were they right or wrong, and how does the digital world change their view of life and good behaviour?

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4. Problems for 'broadcast' media (all platforms): privacy, accuracy, free speech, respect for grief, commercial sensitivity, transparency.

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5. Ethics for **journalists** in the digital age: practical considerations, two-way street with the audience, loss of gatekeeper status Examination of codes from the days of the 'legacy media' such as SPJ, NUJ. What revision is necessary. Fact v. comment. Public image of media professionals.

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6. Ethics for **public relations and marketing** officers: trust and credibility – how can this be established in cyberspace? Openness, honesty, loyalty. Potted history of public relations ethics from Ivy Lee at start of 20th century. Crisis-management – what happens when your product turns out to be poisonous? Or if an employee thought he was being funny online?

7. **Free speech:** everyone has a platform – everyone can broadcast. How should we be wary of this power, and while respecting the First Amendment, not do harm to innocent or vulnerable people by allowing extremist opinions to circulate? Twitter and texting – can 'the rules' apply? Unconsidered commentary is a bad thing, but is it our right?

8. **Privacy**: the online world IS the world. It's on all the time, everywhere – ubiquitous. Being without its constant presence is alarming for first-world citizens. Since Edward Snowden's revelations, and Mark Zuckerberg's declaration that privacy is dead, a once-sacred part of life has become 'old-fashioned'. How does, and should, the modern communications professional view individual privacy?

9. **Twitter, Facebook and their counterparts:** we step back and take a look at the history, commercial success, and social role of these platforms. How is good behaviour encouraged or bad punished? Google set the tone by promising to "do no evil".

10. **Pictures:** the reality – or is it - that is now available to everyone. Protecting children, and sensitivity surround images of death or injury. Verification and impact.

11. **The world in your hand – your cellphone.** Underpinning all our thought about digital behaviour and ethics is the reality that our cellphones are an extension of our beings, are with us all the time, and permit intrusion into our lives and thoughts that were impossible with previous media such as television, radio, and newspapers. It is a whole different level of responsibility for mass content providers or would-be manipulators.

12. **Who controls internet behaviour – and who should.** We consider the roles of Internet Service Providers, the government, UN bodies and ICANN, activists such as Kim Dotcom.