

JOU4700
Problems and Ethics of Journalism and Society
University of Florida
Spring 2026 Syllabus

T 11:45am-1:40pm
R 12:50pm-1:40pm

Instructor: Dr. Matthew Barnidge
Email: matthew.barnidge@ufl.edu
Office: TBD | Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Reading, analysis, and planning in current and projected issues in journalism, both in their professional and societal aspects. **Prerequisite:** 4JM designation.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to ...

1. Relate philosophies of journalism to one another.
2. Translate key texts into insights about the contemporary media landscape.
3. Apply ethical principles to real-world case studies in journalism.
4. Analyze journalistic practices in ethical terms.
5. Synthesize observations about journalism into clear and cogent claims.
6. Argue for or against emerging ethical principles and systems.

Required Software and Materials

- Readings will be provided on Canvas.
- Access to a computer with internet and camera.

Assignments and Grading

Participation: This is a discussion-based course with a small student-to-teacher ratio. Participation is essential to create a vibrant and robust discussion. As such, students will be graded on the frequency and quality of their contributions to discussions.

Discussion lead: Each student will be responsible for leading the discussion in one class session. Responsibilities include (1) completing the readings for the week, (2) developing a list of questions for the class, and (3) leading and managing the class discussion of the topic. Please see the Outline of Topics, as well as the detailed Course Schedule in a separate document.

Response papers: Each student must submit five papers over the course of the semester that respond to the weekly readings. The papers should be ~300-450 words, and they should (1)

synthesize the main ideas from the week's reading(s) with other ideas from inside or outside of the course, and (2) offer original commentary or insights into the themes, topics, and ideas discussed in the synthesis. Please see the Outline of Topics, as well as the detailed Course Schedule in a separate document.

Podcast-style interview: Students will pair up with one other classmate to record a podcast-style interview (recording on a phone is acceptable; the file can be video or audio). Each partner will interview the other, and each will turn in the interview they *gave* to the other person (i.e., the one *about you*). The interview should be a platform or vehicle for brainstorming about your Ted Talk topic. This is a great opportunity to probe, elaborate, expound, take mental detours and tangents, and generally explore the contours and boundaries of your topic.

Ethics case study: Students will analyze a real-world case study in journalism according to various ethical frameworks and principles, then render a decision about what they would do based on their analysis.

Annotated bibliography: Students will compile an annotated list of relevant scholarly sources on a topic of their choosing. The list should be in the service of developing their final presentation (Ted Talk), and their notes should not only summarize but also synthesize the literature.

Ted Talk: Each student will give a final presentation that will take the form of a Ted Talk. The talk should be approximately 12 minutes, and it should (1) introduce a relevant problem in journalism and society and (2) discuss possible solutions or pathways forward for journalists, journalism, or society. The presentation should build off of the annotated bibliography and draw from the literature it outlines and annotates. The presentation will be followed by a short (2-5 min) question-and-answer session.

List of Assignments and Points

Participation	10 points
Discussion lead	15 points
Response papers	25 points (5 x 5 points)
Podcast-style interview	5 points
Ethics case study	10 points
Annotated bibliography	5 points
Ted Talk presentation	30 points
<hr/>	
Total	100 points

Grading Scale

A	94 and above
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
E	59 and below
I	Incomplete
W	Withdrawn

Note: See the following website for University grading policies:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Note: Grades will be rounded to the nearest point (e.g., 89.5 rounds to 90, but 89.4 rounds to 89)

Course Policies

Attendance: There is no official attendance requirement for the course. However, excessive absence will affect your participation grade, and it also could (but not necessarily) diminish the quality of your work.

Participation: The participation grade is not merely an attendance grade. Rather, students must earn the grade through active participation in course activities. Regular attendance is necessary to achieve this goal, but not sufficient.

Late and Missing Coursework: There is no official policy limiting the timeframe in which students can turn in or complete late and missed coursework. Rather, late and missing coursework will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Please notify me as soon as possible if you know you will be late or miss coursework.

Electronic Devices: There is no official prohibition on the use of electronic devices for personal reasons during class. However, I reserve the right to prohibit the use of devices on a case-by-case basis.

Disability: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/>) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Religious Accommodations: The University mandates reasonable accommodations for the religious observances, practices, and beliefs of individual students in regard to class

attendance and the scheduling of examinations and work assignments. Please notify me as soon as possible if you know you will seek accommodation. The official university policy can be found here: <https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-052/>

Mental Health and Wellness: The University has robust resources for student mental health and wellness. Please contact the Counseling and Wellness Center to seek help when needed: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575.

Honor Code: All students enrolled at the University have tacitly agreed to follow the university's honor code. You can review UF's academic honesty guidelines at: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code>

Cheating and Plagiarism: Students are expected to complete coursework on their own and not in collaboration with others inside or outside of the class unless explicitly authorized to do so by the instructor. Students are also expected to observe intellectual property rights and to comply with copyright laws. Finally, students should not plagiarize the words, designs, concepts or ideas of others. Plagiarism is defined as "...taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own." Source: Dictionary.com.

Artificial Intelligence: The use of AI in this course is permissible, particularly as a study aid and/or strategy assistant. However, students should use caution when turning in work that is wholly generated by AI. If they do use AI tools to generate coursework, students are strongly encouraged to take an *active role* in shaping both the input and output of AI prompting.

Non-Discrimination/Harassment: The University is committed to nondiscrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations, genetic information and veteran status as protected under the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act. It is the policy of the University that each employee and student be allowed to work and study in an environment free from any form of discrimination or harassment as defined in University regulations or law. You can review the University's policy on non-discrimination and harassment at <https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/1-006/>.

Outline of Topics

Module	Week	Topic	Major Assignments
Course Introduction	Week 1	Course Introduction	
Journalism as Social Institution	Week 2	History	
	Week 3	Practices	
	Week 4	Politics	
	Week 5	Economics	Podcast-Style Interview
Ethics and Metaethics of Journalism	Week 6	Study Bre	
	Week 7	Traditional Ethical Models	
	Week 8	Non-Traditional Ethical Models	Ethics Case Study
	Week 9	Metaethics	
Problems and Issues in American Journalism	Week 10	Spring Break	
	Week 11	Trust & Legitimacy	
	Week 12	Truth & Epistemologies	Annotated Bibliography
	Week 13	Economics of Tech Platforms	
End-of-Semester	Week 14	Technology & Human Futures	
End-of-Semester	Week 15		Final Presentations