

Problems & Ethics in Journalism

JOU 4700 - Fall 2013

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9-11 a.m. & by appointment. I can be
available most Mondays and before class
Tuesday/Thursday, but it's always best to
schedule appointments.

NOTE: The following information **WILL** be useful to you - but only **IF** you take the time to read it.

Objectives: You may find this surprising, but JOU 4700 is, in many ways, a skills course. The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the most common ethical issues and dilemmas the modern working journalist is likely to encounter. But even more than that, the course is designed to teach students systematic processes for making decisions about those dilemmas, as well as grounding the discussion in the classical ethical philosophies that underlie such decision-making.

This course is not designed to give you a list of rules for ethical behavior. Rather, it is intended to give you tools for and practice in thinking about how to identify and resolve the kinds of ethical problems you will face as a journalist.

Through the class, students will learn to:

- Identify ethical dilemmas in journalism, including determining how to anticipate and consider different stakeholders' perspectives on those dilemmas
- Engage in critical thinking to identify and describe a variety of alternative responses to journalism ethics problems
- Use an ethical decision-making model and critical thinking skills to reason through journalism ethics dilemmas
- Assess and describe the ethical justifiability of possible alternative responses in terms of journalistic duty and/or the reasonable predictable consequences of those responses
- Make and justify decisions about which responses are most ethically sound

Success in the class is NOT based on whether you're a good person or whether I believe you're a good person. I assume that you're all good people. To do well in the class, you must learn a set of concepts and skills and demonstrate your ability to apply them appropriately to new situations and new sets of facts. In other words, JOU 4700 is pretty much like any

other course you've taken, except that it might prompt you to do more thinking about your own values and beliefs.

Class Participation: Class participation is required. That means you'll be expected to show up for class **having read the assigned readings** and to listen attentively to lecturers, guest speakers and the comments of classmates. You also will be expected to demonstrate that you're thinking about the issues by asking questions, offering your own opinions and justifications for those opinions, participating in class debate, posting comments and questions to the e-learning site and keeping your eyes and ears open for current events that may relate to class discussions.

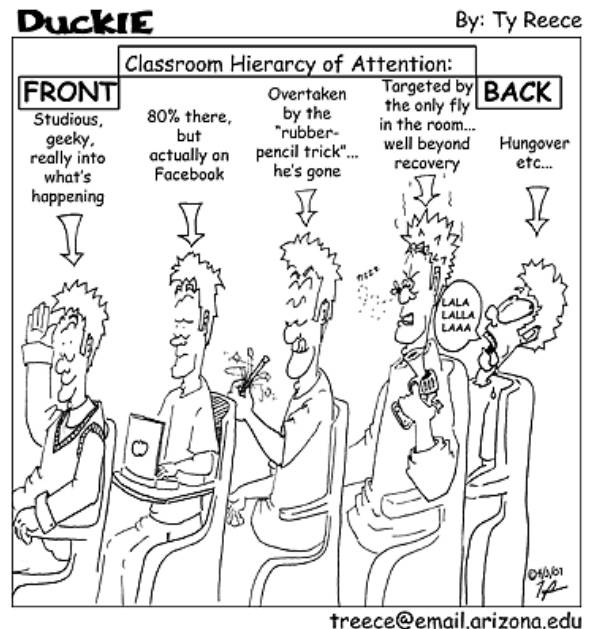
In addition to being physically present in class, I expect you to be mentally present. **That means you will NOT be texting, emailing or using your laptop or phone to Web-surf, work on assignments for another class or interact with any social networking site during class time. Unless there's a specific need for someone in the class to get online, leave your laptop closed during class. I know many of you are convinced you're great at multi-tasking. You're wrong about that.**

Readings: There is no required text for the course. However, there ARE assigned readings, most all of which will be available via the e-learning site. Past experience has taught me – sadly – that many students tend not to do the readings unless they're required in some way. (*Aside: How can you expect to be a JOURNALIST if you don't READ?*) So you can expect a brief quiz over the readings at least every other week, possibly more often.

Current events: You cannot be an ethical journalist – or an ethical journalism student – without paying attention to events occurring in the world around you. Therefore, if/when there is an important journalism ethics issue in the news, I'll consider it fair game for inclusion in the semi-weekly/weekly quiz. (I'll only use new journalism ethics cases in the class quizzes if they've been getting substantial news coverage in either local [Gainesville] or national media.) You can increase your likelihood of being able to answer such questions correctly by telling me about ethical cases I might not have heard about.

Ethics Memos: To give you a chance to practice applying ethical reasoning to situations you may encounter or hear/read about – and to help you prepare for the exams and for real-world ethical decision-making – you will be required to turn in two pairs of ethics memos, which will be graded. You'll find more specific instructions in a separate document.

Tests: There will be two tests, each one covering approximately half of the course. The tests – usually three essay questions – will be scored based on the extent to which your answers reflect a



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clear understanding of the issues, the ability to apply ethical reasoning and decision-making models to those issues and your skill in clearly expressing and defending a position on those issues. Each test will be worth 230 points. NOTE: See the attached schedule for test dates. Unfortunately, UF's schedule this year leaves no Thursday class period after Thanksgiving, so we have to complete the second exam BEFORE Thanksgiving – Nov. 22. (The regular exam period is too late to give me time to grade essay exams and calculate grades.)

Case Study/Journalist Interview Project: You may choose to work individually or with up to three classmates to produce a report that may take either of two forms. The group project option is to describe a real-life journalism ethics case, while the other involves conducting an in-depth interview with a *working* journalist of your choosing and analyzing his/her approach to ethical decision-making. I'll put further instructions for completing these projects, as well as examples of good previous projects, on the class e-learning site. **Topics/interviewees must be approved in advance.** Independent journalists whose work primarily appears in a blog MAY be acceptable as interviewees, provided the journalist regularly does independent reporting. A blogger who merely aggregates and comments on work others have produced will not be acceptable as an interviewee. The **quality of the writing** will affect your grade on the paper, and that will include correct spelling and use of grammar, punctuation and AP and reference style. Hey, folks, you're in journalism school – of course the writing counts.

Each student working on a group project will critique each other group member's contribution to the final project, and these critiques will affect the grades individual members receive.

The paper is due Dec. 3.

PAPER GRADES WILL DROP ONE FULL LETTER GRADE FOR EACH DAY THE PAPER IS LATE, BEGINNING AT 11:30 a.m. Dec. 3 (last day of class). NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER FRIDAY, DEC. 6. THIS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE.

Extra Credit: DO NOT rely on earning extra credit to make up for failure to attend class, do the readings, put significant effort into learning the concepts and bolstering your critical thinking skills, turning assignments in correctly and on time, etc. The maximum amount of extra credit I will give any student would be 50 points (of 1,000 total) – enough perhaps to raise a C+ to a B- or B but not enough to raise a D+ to the C+ required to get credit for completing the course. I will not substitute extra credit points for an assignment you failed to turn in.

Some ways to earn extra credit:

- Complete free Poynter NewsU courses listed in syllabus; use the NewsU function to send me an official email documenting your completion. Be aware that the email will show me how much time you spent on the course – so don't bother if you only enrolled and looked at the first screen or two.
- Bring in or email to me materials (e.g. original stories, photos, blog posts, etc.) relevant to ethics issues we're discussing in class. (If you email, make sure you get a reply from me acknowledging receipt. Sometimes your emails inexplicably go to my junk mail folder.)
- Identify and help me make contact with a potential guest speaker who could Skype in to the class to talk about an ethics case in which he/she has been involved.
- Other possibilities may be offered in class.

Grading: Grades will be determined as follows:

Test 1

230 points

Test 2	230 points	
Case study/journalist interview report	220 points	
Ethics memos	120 points	(60 points each)
Quizzes	100 points	
Class participation	100 points	
Total possible	1,000 points	

I use minus grades so that individuals who do superior work receive GPA points reflecting that accomplishment. Final grades will be based on these break-points:

A- = 90-93.5%	A = 93.6%+	
B- = 80-83.5%	B=83.6-87%	B+=87.1%-89.9%
C- = 70-73.5%	B=73.6-77%	B+=77.1%-79.9%
D- = 60-63.5%	D=63.6-67%	D+=67.1%-69.9%
E = 59.9% or lower		

It is possible, though unlikely, that the grades will be curved. You can check how letter grades relate to grade points assigned at this [website](#).

Accommodation for disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation for a disability must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student, who will bring a copy of this documentation to me. If you do have a disability that requires accommodation, please do not hesitate to request it, *even if you don't believe you'll need it* during the course of this class.

Academic Honesty Issues: For heaven's sake, this is an ETHICS course, so I shouldn't even have to mention this. See this [page](#) for a reminder and explanation of what UF's honor code requires. **IF YOU AREN'T CERTAIN** that what you're contemplating doing is OK, it probably isn't. There is only ONE person who can tell you whether *I* consider something to be academic dishonesty – and that's **me**. Do not trust another student or any other professor to know what will be acceptable in my class. (This is good advice for any class.) ASK!!!

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY for academic honesty violations: Plagiarism and fabricating information have become serious problems – and an embarrassment to our profession. In most instances, those caught plagiarizing or fabricating information have been fired. I expect you to behave professionally in your work for this class. Therefore, if I determine that you've plagiarized information or that you've fabricated information (i.e. interviews) for your work in this class, **you'll fail the class**. If I find you've cheated on a test, **you'll fail the class**. **That's the whole CLASS, not just the assignment**. In addition, I will report the violation to the Student Conduct office.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS FOR FALL 2013

Unless there's some other indication, the readings will be available through the course Sakai e-learning site. The surveys listed are just for fun – you're not required to take them.

Date	Topic(s)	Readings
8/22, 27	Introduction & context	State of the News Media 2013, Read the Overview , along with any of the rest of the report that interests you. Pew, " Further decline in credibility ratings for most news organizations " Campbell, " Challenging America's me-first culture "
8/29-9/5	Values & relativism – why can't we ALL be right? Moral development **Case study/journalist interview prospectus due 9/5	Elliott, "All is not relative" Kohlberg & Gilligan compilation <i>Just for fun quiz:</i> What's Your Ethical Style? After the Quiz: 2 Ethical Styles
9/10, 12	Critical thinking – why it's important, how to do it Ethical approaches and ethical reasoning 1 st ethics decision memo due 9/12	<i>NOTE: You'll do a better job on your 1st decision memo if you read these materials early.</i> Kovach & Rosenstiel, "The Way of Skeptical Knowing;" Geisler, " Critical thinking: What do you mean by that? " BBC Ethics Guide. Read the sections on duty-based ethics and on consequentialism : Plaisance, "Ethics Theory Overview" Extra Credit: Complete Poynter NewsU course "Introduction to Ethical Decision-Making" https://www.newsu.org/courses/introduction-ethical-decision-making
9/17, 19	Ethical decision-making as a process	SPJ Ethics Code ; ASME Guidelines ; NPPA Code of Ethics
9/24, 26	Confidential sources, deception, hidden cameras, etc. 2 nd ethics decision memo due 9/26	Welcome to the sausage factory ; Celebrity magazines' odd anonymous outlook ; Lying to get the truth ; Journalists beware: Shell Arctic hoax signals move from subtle spin to activist deception

Date	Topic(s)	Readings
10/1, 3	Conflicts of interest	Walsh, " Journalists face conflicts of interest, too; " Reilly, " Scott Brown's journalist wife: A conflict of interest? " Temple, " Swag taints tech coverage, raises ethics questions "
10/8, 10	Review for Exam 1 ***Exam 1 10/10***	
10/15, 17	Journalism & politics Preliminary report on Case Study/Journalist Interview paper due 10/17	Huppke, " Facts 360 B.C.-A.D. 2012; " Reider, " Calling a Lie a Lie; " Lieberman, " Does journalistic 'balance' hurt America? " " The media & Campaign 2012 " (<i>feel free to watch the video version of the report</i>)
10/22, 24	Privacy	Tenore, " When crime victims tweet "; Dukehart, " What it feels like to be photographed in a moment of grief " Extra Credit: Complete Poynter NewsU course "Reporting on Sexual Violence" https://www.newsu.org/courses/reporting-sexual-violence
10/29, 31	Special photo-/video-journalism ethics issues: Privacy, the Wheaties test & digital photo-editing	Emmett, " Too Graphic? " Heyboer, " Graphic photos of bin Laden raid released by Reuters; " Myers, " Washington Post raises eyebrows, questions with 'composite' photo on front page "
11/5, 7	Covering race, religion & other related issues Ethics case study/interview paper DRAFT due 11/7 (optional but recommended)	McBride, " Can stories like the Zimmerman trial point to a better journalism? " Extra Credit: Complete any or all of 3 Poynter NewsU courses Religion, Culture and Society: Getting Beyond the Clichés: https://www.newsu.org/courses/religion-culture-society Covering Islam in America: https://www.newsu.org/courses/covering-islam Handling Race and Ethnicity: https://www.newsu.org/courses/handling-race-and-ethnicity
11/12, 14	Online journalism ethics issues	RTDNA Social Media & Blogging Guidelines; "Journalism ethics apply to social media;" Betancourt, " How social media is radically changing the newsroom; "

11/19, 21

Review for Exam 2

*****Exam 2 11/21*****

11/26

Meet individually to discuss
final papers
Enjoy Thanksgiving Break!!



12/3

Turn in final papers
Printed AND electronic copies
of papers (and peer
evaluations for groups) due by
11:30 a.m. 12/3.
