

Problems and Ethics in Journalism – JOU 4700
Course Syllabus – Spring 2015
Tuesdays from 3-6 p.m.
Florida Gym, Room 0230

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Course Description and Student Objectives:

The purpose of the course is to introduce you to the most common ethical issues and dilemmas journalists are likely to encounter and procedures for making decisions about those dilemmas. 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 may face as a journalist.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify ethical dilemmas in journalism, including determining how to anticipate and consider different stakeholders' perspectives on those dilemmas
- Identify and describe a variety of alternative responses to journalism ethics problems
- Use an ethical decision-making model to reason through journalism ethics dilemmas
- Make and justify decisions about which responses are most ethically sound

Required Readings:

The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect (Third Edition), by Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel (ISBN-10: 0307346706)

You will be expected to read the assigned chapters/pages and be prepared to discuss them in class. These readings are crucial to understanding what you will be doing in this course. Also, as you will see below in the syllabus, there will be occasional pop quizzes based on the materials. So do not neglect to do the readings.

The Work:

Here are descriptions for the main assessments in this course:

- **Participation:** Problems and Ethics in Journalism is a discussion-based course. Therefore, participation is required. That means you'll be expected to read the assigned readings and listen attentively to lectures 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, justifications for those opinions and participating in class debate.

As well as pop quizzes, participation points will also be derived from occasional ethics response papers, which are one- to two-page write ups that will give you a chance to practice applying ethical reasoning to situations you may encounter — either through the readings or in class. These will help prepare you for your exams, group project and real-world ethical decision-making. These are listed under participation because they will receive a completion grade. If you take the response papers seriously and turn them in on time, you will receive full credit.

- **Exams:** There will be two exams in this course, a midterm and a final, each one covering approximately half of the course. These exams will usually consist of multiple-choice questions and a few short essay questions.

The essay-style questions will be scored based on the extent to which your answers reflect a clear understanding of the issues, your 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. More specific details about each exam will be provided closer to each test date.

- **Group Project:** Groups of four to six students will be assigned a past or recent ethical dilemma faced by journalists. Similar to the exam essay questions, this group project will assess your ability to demonstrate a clear understanding of the issue you're assigned, what dilemmas the journalist(s) faced as well as apply ethical reasoning and decision-making models to that issue and clearly articulate and defend how your group would handle the same situation.

Your group will present your issue and opinions to the class and lead a classroom discussion on that issue. These presentations will occur throughout the semester, but each group will only present once. More specific details about the topics for project and grading will be provided in class.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Your final grade in the course will be arrived at through the following combination:

- **Participation Points:**
 - Class Participation 5 points
 - Attendance 10 points
 - Pop Quizzes/Response Papers 10 points
 - **Total 25 points**
- **Exams:**
 - Midterm 25 points
 - Final Exam 25 points
 - **Total 50 points**
- **Group Project: 25 points**
- **Total Possible: 100 points**

Grading Scale:

A	= 94-100	B-	= 80-83	D+	= 67-69
A-	= 90-93	C+	= 77-79	D	= 64-66
B+	= 87-89	C	= 74-76	D-	= 60-63
B	= 84-86	C-	= 70-73	E	= 59 and below

Class Policies:

1. **Attendance and Tardiness:** Attendance in this class is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of class. We will be doing valuable in-class activities and having important discussions, so it is essential you attend class and arrive promptly.

Excessive tardiness and unexcused absences will affect your participation points. You can miss one class without documentation or penalty against your participation points. However, if a pop quiz or exam is given or an assignment is due on the day you miss, your grade on that assessment could be affected. In the case of a documented/known illness, family emergency or if you have some other situation you think may constitute a reason for an excused absence, like a legal or military obligation, athletic participation or religious holiday, please let me know in advance.

2. **Deadlines:** Any and all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day listed on the course schedule. This is a strict deadline.

If, for any reason, you do think you will miss a deadline or exam, please discuss it with me at least 24 hours in advance. Under legitimate extenuating circumstances, like the ones discussed under the attendance policy, I may agree to let you schedule a make-up exam or turn in an assignment late. However, if I have not agreed to an extension or make-up exam before class begins on the due date or scheduled test day, your assignment or exam grade will be a zero.

3. **Classroom Demeanor:** I want this class to be fun and energetic with great discussions. So I expect you to participate fully during discussions, either voluntarily or when called upon. If you are called upon and have not read the material, I expect you to honestly decline comment because you haven't read.

I understand college is stressful and sometimes reading will take a back seat to other classes and assignments. Because of this, you get one free pass during the semester where you can say you didn't read without penalty to your participation points. However, only three students can use their free pass during each class, so use your free pass wisely.

In addition, I expect you to be attentive and courteous to your fellow classmates and to me. Please do not engage in side conversations. Also, this is a safe space to share and express opinions. Please be polite to others while both expressing opinions and responding to them.

4. **Cell Phones and Other Devices:** Research shows students who multi-task in class end up learning less and therefore get much lower grades than students who focus on taking notes and participating in class discussions. So please turn off your cell phones, no texting in class and do not use any electronic device for any reason (other than taking notes) unless I direct you otherwise. Yes, communications is a technology-driven field, and there will be times where we will use technology as part of class, but it should be a learning tool not a distraction. Using devices for unexcused reasons could result in the loss of participation points.
5. **Academic Integrity:** University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty such as (but not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of sources or information from sources, reusing a paper from another class, writing a similar paper for two classes, drawing too heavily on another's work for your own and having someone else complete your work for you. If you're unsure of whether something constitutes a violation of academic integrity, ask me before turning in an assignment. Also, please refer to the University of Florida's guidelines regarding academic honesty at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>. Ignorance is not an excuse.

My default practice for an academic integrity violation is a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the entire course, and the instance will be reported to the university's office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

6. **Disability Assistance:** Students with disabilities who seek reasonable accommodations in the classroom or other aspects of performing their coursework must first register with the University of Florida's Disability Resource Center. The center will provide documentation, and then you must meet with me, so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, and you can contact them by calling (352) 392-8565. For more information, visit <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.
7. **Student Success and Seeking Help:** All of your instructors have high expectations of you, including myself. We are responsible for conveying those expectations to you. You are responsible for ensuring you meet your course obligations. Sometimes it will be draining and frustrating like it is in the communications field. But ultimately, it should also be enjoyable and purposeful. You are always encouraged to come to me both inside and outside of class with questions or concerns about this class and your assignments or the communications field in general.

Also, the UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call (352) 392-1575. For more information, visit <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>.

8. **Online Course Evaluation Process:** Just as I give feedback on your work throughout the semester, I would also like to get feedback from you on the quality of instruction in this course. Because of this, students are expected to complete online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

Course Schedule:

Here is the tentative schedule for this semester. All readings scheduled are due on the date listed on the syllabus, meaning you need to have read them prior to coming to class that day. The schedule is subject to change depending on the needs of the class.

- Jan. 6 Introduction to the course and syllabus
What is ethics?
- Jan. 13 What is the purpose of journalism?
A history of ethics in journalism
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 1
Ethics Response Paper Due
- Jan. 20 What is truth?
Deceptions in journalism and confidential sources
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapters 2
Ethics Response Paper Due
- Jan. 27 Who do journalists work for?
Ethical decision making processes and codes of ethics
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 3
Group Presentation 1
- Feb. 3 Fabrication vs. Interpretive Journalism
Should journalists be objective?
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 4
Ethics Response Paper Due
- Feb. 10 Detachment vs. helping
Conflicts of interest
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 5
Group Presentation 2
- Feb. 17 Review for midterm exam
- Feb. 24 **MIDTERM EXAM**

- March 3 **SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS**
- March 10 Watchdog journalism and politics
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 6
Group Presentation 3
- March 17 Online ethical issues and privacy
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 7
Group Presentation 4
- March 24 Photo and video ethical issues
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 8
Group Presentation 5
- March 31 Sensationalism, framing and one-sided news
Media economics
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 9
Group Presentation 6
- April 7 Ethics and advertising and public relations
Having a personal conscience
Read The Elements of Journalism Chapter 10
Group Presentation 7
- April 14 Review for final exam
- April 21 **FINAL EXAM**