

PROBLEMS & ETHICS IN JOURNALISM: JOU4700*05A5

Tuesdays, & Thursdays, 10:40 a.m. - 12:35 p.m.,

Tuesdays: Weimer Room 1074

Thursdays: Weimar Room 1090

August 23 to Dec. 6 2012

FALL 2012

Professor Daniel Axelrod

Office Hours: By appointment (ask professor if you'd like to schedule a meeting)

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This media ethics course will focus on the ways journalists and news organizations make decisions, debate real-world examples of journalistic behavior and cover the current state of the media. The class will spend the bulk of its time doing two things: defining and explaining the core tenets of journalism ethics, and analyzing real and hypothetical ethical breaches in the media. The course also will provide an overview of the evolution of journalism ethics and its history — from the media's earliest days to its corporatization, consolidation and the present tumultuous times. The purpose of this curriculum is to prepare students to be critical-thinking consumers and producers of media content, and to prepare UF graduates to recognize, responsibly address, and (whenever possible) prevent the ethical challenges journalists face in the digital age.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will learn the:

- Definition of high-quality, ethical journalism
- Reasons ethical breaches occur
- Role of journalists, their duty to the public, and the history of journalism ethics
- Rights and responsibilities of news consumers and the sources journalists interview
- Ethics of journalism across platforms (telecommunications, print and online outlets)
- Central tenants of journalism ethics, including the SPJ Code of Ethics and vital concepts such as “independence,” how to use an “objective method,” “verification,” “a skeptical way of knowing,” and how to practice “interpretive journalism”
- How the corporatization and consolidation of the media has affected journalism
- State of the industry and the uneasy tension between profits and public service journalism
- Other current challenges/industry trends in regard to journalism ethics

COURSE CONFIGURATION

- **Lectures:** I will devote roughly 40-50% of our class time to lecturing about the journalism ethics topics. You will still need to read the class books to prepare for the exams. But going to the lectures will help you because many of the core concepts I cover also are discussed in the books.

- **Class discussions about media ethics cases and in-class video screenings:** For the other half of our time together, I plan to have seminar-style discussions in which we arrange the desks in a shape resembling a circle and talk about journalism ethics. Topics will include past/famous media ethics cases, and ethics-related examples from the latest journalism industry current events (drawn from such sources as Poynter’s MediaWire). I can’t stress enough the importance of class participation.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *The Elements of Journalism*, by Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel (2007 paperback edition)
- *Blur: How to Know What’s True in the Age of Information Overload*, by Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel (2011 paperback edition)
- *The New Media Monopoly* by Ben Bagdikian (Revised, updated 2004 paperback edition)

RECOMMENDED WEBSITE

IMPORTANT: Students should regularly visit the Poynter Institute’s MediaWire. Please keep an eye out for stories related to media ethics. Bring up the topics during my lessons and try to relate them to my lessons. This is a quick and easy way to boost your class grade.

<http://tinyurl.com/7mk72uq> or <http://www.poynter.org/category/latest-news/mediawire/>

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

- Being polite and respectful to your classmates and me. Discussions may get heated, but everyone must keep cool, respect one another and be polite.
- Attendance and punctuality. I don’t mind lateness. I know roads fill with traffic. Things happen. But attendance is very important. If you have more than one cut, it will affect your grade. If you need to be absent more than once, you should email or call me to ask permission for an excused absence (provided you have a legitimate, documentable reason) I reserve the right to decide what constitutes an excused absence.
- Computers. You are allowed to take notes with a laptop. But, unless I ask you to go online, please don’t. Additionally, please don’t check your email or social media websites during class time. I will lower your overall grade if you break these rules.
- Cell phones: Keep them off. If I hear your cell phone go off for a text or a phone call, I get to answer the phone or send a text back to the person. You will lose five points off your next test if you don’t allow me to do so. The same goes for my cell phone. If my phone goes off, the first person to raise his or her hand gets to answer the call or respond to the text.

RECOMMENDED TV PROGRAM

Students can earn extra points and excel in class by watching “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” on Comedy Central. To earn extra credit and/or boost your class participation grade, be sure to mention topics from the show (I may end up showing your suggested clips in class) and relate those Daily Show topics back to my lessons. The program airs at 11 p.m., Mon. -Thurs.

ASSESSMENT & GRADING

Grading Scale

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89

B = 83-86

B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79

C = 73-76

C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69

D = 65-66

F = Less than 65

Test schedule

Assignment	Grade %
Test #1 <i>The Elements of Journalism</i> October 4	25%
Test #2 <i>Blur</i> November 1	25%
Test #3 <i>New Media Monopoly</i> (Avoid pgs 30-49 & 55-77). November 29	25%
<u>Class participation</u> ; attendance; punctuality, enthusiasm in volunteering for and participating in class activities; polite classroom etiquette (E.g. You're courteous to classmates. You don't use your cell phones or misuse computers during class. You're fully engaged in and paying attention to lectures).	25%
Final	Pass/Fail

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1. Three tests:** Several weeks before each exam, I will give you copies of the actual tests for each book. For more information, see the "More on Tests" section in this syllabus.
- 2. Class Participation:** Attendance, punctuality and class participation are important parts of your grade. But *class participation is, by far, the most important component*. During class discussions, *you can significantly boost your valuable class participation grade by:*

- ****Paying attention during lectures and making smart comments/asking intelligent questions.**
 - ****Commenting on the class readings.**
 - Bringing up journalism current events topics and ethics-related issues (again, check Poynter's MediaWire for ideas).
 - Mentioning things you saw on the Daily Show and relating them to the topics we're studying.
- 3. In- and out-of-class readings and assignments:** *Make sure that you have a homework buddy.* I will frequently give readings and assignments that aren't listed in the syllabus. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to chat with your homework buddy and get the information for these assignments, readings and any notes from the lectures. Missing class also means that you risk missing a quiz or other in-class assignment, and you won't be allowed to make those up. The assignments on this syllabus are only a guide, and they are subject to change. And I *do not* share my PowerPoint slides unless you have a letter from the Disability Resource Center or a legitimate, documentable reason (E.g. a death in the family) for needing them. In addition, I strongly recommend that you create an email folder for my messages (I send a fair amount of them), so you can keep track of class updates and new reading assignments.
- 4. Final Exam:** It's pass/fail. Attendance is mandatory. If you don't take the final exam, you will fail for the year.

MORE ON TESTS

You will take three exams that are based almost entirely on the books you read outside of class. *Several weeks before you take the tests, I will give you copies of the exams. In the questions, I'll even include the chapter numbers so you know exactly where the information appears in the books.* I reserve the right to add to or otherwise change the questions that appear on the test. But most likely, the study guides will be almost identical to the tests you take.

- You may type your answers in a Microsoft Word Document, which I will retrieve from your computer with my memory stick. Or you may write your answers on blue book pieces of paper, which you will have to purchase from bookstore.
- When you begin your test, your Word Document/paper must be blank. You *may not* use any kind of outline or notes. I will roam the room to ensure that you don't import an outside file. *And I reserve the right to give you a different test from the study materials I hand out.*
- Before you begin the exam, you will leave all hats, book bags, cell phones and other possessions on the floor near me in the front of the classroom. You will have nothing on your desk except a laptop (if you're using a computer) or a writing utensil and the paper blue book you bought from the bookstore (if you're writing your answers on paper).
- You are not allowed to use the Internet while taking your tests.
- These will not be open book tests. You *may not* use any books, the class texts, the Internet, your phone or any form of assistance (electronic, paper, etc.).
- As mentioned, one reason that it's helpful to attend lectures is that I'll discuss concepts that may appear on the tests. But the best way to do well on the tests is to read the books and take a mock test using each study guide. (Make an outline/plan for your answers. But remember that you won't be able to use your outline during the test).

- Whenever possible, support your points with examples from the assigned books. If you want, you also may use examples from other class readings and my lectures. The best test answers will use plenty of examples and demonstrate that you read and understand the concepts in the books.

PLAGIARISM, CHEATING & OTHER RULES

This is, after all, an ethics class. So, it would be extra silly and ironic to cheat. You should know:

- **About the automatic “F”:** You will automatically receive an “F” if you plagiarize or cheat during any of the exams or other class assignments.
- **Only you can write it:** All assignments and tests must be a student’s own work.
- **If you didn’t write it, say it or think it, it must be properly attributed:** Students must always reference sources and use attribution for sources (such as the words “said” and “according to” and quotation marks when necessary).
- **If you’re using the exact same words as your source, use quotation marks:** Students must use quotation marks and/or attribution when material is taken from a source verbatim. Students must attribute information to a source even if the student has paraphrased the sentence, idea or information.
- **Know when to cite your source:** Students must understand that a “source” is not just an interviewee. The word “source” refers to any idea, information or opinion from primary and secondary materials and interviews with individuals. Students must learn to follow proper journalistic style when it comes to citing sources. If you have any questions, I will help you learn how to cite sources.
- **Don’t chance getting caught:** When students plagiarize, it’s rare that they’re not caught. The risks of being caught plagiarizing far outweigh the potential benefits. Plagiarism, cheating or faking facts will result in punishments up to and including an “F” grade and a referral to the University of Florida’s disciplinary office.
- **Know the University of Florida’s plagiarism and honor code policies:**
 UF’s Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism: <http://tinyurl.com/8m3yam7>
 Plagiarism and the UF Honor Code: <http://tinyurl.com/9c8l4tm>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you need to request a classroom accommodation for a disability, you must first register with the Disability Resource Office. The DRC will provide you with documentation, and you must meet personally with me and bring a copy of the documentation so you can explain it. If you do have a disability that requires some kind of accommodation, *please* do not hesitate to request a DRC letter (*even if you don’t believe you’ll need it during the course of this class*).

READINGS

Suggested reading schedule

The pace at which you read these books doesn’t matter as long as you read them in their entirety before each test. This is just a suggested reading schedule based on simple math (the number of pages in each book divided by the number of weeks you have to read each one).

- For *Elements of Journalism*, you have six weeks to read an average of 42 pages per week.
- For *Blur*, you have more than five weeks to read an average of 42 pages per week.

- For *The New Media Monopoly*, you have more than five weeks to read an average of 45 pages per week. *Make sure you have the correct edition (the revised 2004 paperback copy), so you can skip pages 30-49 and 55-77.*

MOVIE LIST

What We'll Definitely Watch

- PBS: "Buying the War, How did the Mainstream Press Get it so Wrong?"
- Two Noam Chomsky films
 - "Myth of the Liberal Media"
 - "Manufacturing Consent" (the film, not the book)
- "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism"
- "The Network"
- "Shattered Glass"

Movies We Might Watch (If we have time)

- "Framing an Execution: The Media & Mumia Abu-Jamal"
- "The Billionaires' Tea Party: How Corporate America is Faking a Grassroots Revolution"

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Consider this course schedule, like the life of a journalist, subject to last-minute changes. If you don't attend class, you'll miss out. As mentioned, if you must miss class, homework buddies are strongly recommended. But while the course schedule and assignments themselves may grow and change to suit the needs of the class, we'll cover all these subjects — maybe even in this order! To remind you of some of the key material you will want to learn, I've listed and italicized a healthy sample of the course's core concepts.

August 23 & 28

–Purpose of journalism and the history of journalism ethics

- What is "journalism"?
- What is its purpose, and how did it evolve to include our modern standards of professionalism, ethics and fair coverage?
- Who are journalists loyal to?

August 30, September 4 & 6

–Interpretive Journalism

- Practicing *interpretive journalism*
- Providing *fair and balanced coverage*
- Remaining an *independent and neutral observer* versus being a *passive messenger* or practicing "*He said, she said*" Journalism.
- *Objectivity vs. objective method.*

September 11, 13 & 18

–*Verification, accuracy, evidence and a skeptical way of knowing*

September 20, 25 & 27

–*Framing and agenda setting*

October 2

–*Infotainment and propaganda*

- What stories isn't the corporate media covering?
- A case study of Fox News. Movie: "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism"

October 4

–Test #1: Elements of Journalism

October 9

–*Infotainment and propaganda continued*

- What stories isn't the corporate media covering?
- A case study of Fox News. Movie: "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism"

October 11 & 16

–*Sourcing*

- How to properly source a story — a case study in the media's 2003 Iraq war failures
- Movie: PBS: "Buying the War, How did the Mainstream Press Get it so Wrong?"
- Where do sources come from?
- What's missing?
- Discussion of sources with interests

October 18 & 23

–Plagiarism and Fabrication

- Why do they happen?
- How can they be prevented?
- Famous examples
- Movie: "Shattered Glass"

October 25

–Journalism ethics in the digital age

- In the "Instant Information Age," journalists must "Get it first, but first get it right"
- Ethics of:
 - Using social media (journalists and sources)
 - Being more transparent in the digital age
 - *Citizen journalism*

- Public dialogue over news stories

October 30

–Journalism ethics in the digital age continued

November 1

–Test #2: Blur

November 6 & 8

–*SPJ Code of Ethics*

- Reviewing and understanding the core rules of journalism ethics
- *On the record/off the record*
- Going undercover
- Paparazzi journalism

November 13 & 15 & 20

–Journalistic affects of corporate media ownership and concentration

- *Myth of the liberal media*
- Stories that go uncovered
- *Separation of “church and state”* (Separation between advertising/business side and editorial side. Separation between opinion page and editorial side).
- Profits over public service journalism
- Movie: “Myth of the Liberal Media”
- Movie: “Manufacturing Consent” (the film, not the book)

November 22

–No class. Happy Thanksgiving!

November 27

–Journalism of the future

- What should we be striving to provide?
- Comprehensive & proportionate news
- Techniques for being a strong, ethical journalist

November 29

–Test #3: New Media Monopoly

December 4

–Final