

JOU 5705: ISSUES AND THE PRESS

FALL 2012

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Office Hrs: Monday 9:30-11:30,
Tuesday 1-3, and by appointment. I will
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always best to schedule appointments.

From the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution:

Amendment 1

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The purpose of this course is to give journalism students (and others interested in the practice of journalism) the opportunity to explore important longstanding and current issues in the interaction between journalists, journalistic institutions and the society they are meant to serve. In addition to introducing students to key theoretical perspectives examining the impact of journalists' work on the larger society, the course is designed to familiarize students with some of the most common ethical issues the working journalist is likely to face. Perhaps most importantly, the course is designed to teach students systematic processes for making decisions about ethical dilemmas, as well as grounding the discussion in the classical ethical philosophies that underlie such decision-making.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the time students complete this course, they should be able to:

- Understand key theoretical perspectives about the impact of journalism on the broader society and vice versa;
- 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
- Apply selected ethical philosophies, ethical decision-making models 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

Students will demonstrate these competencies through in-class team presentations on journalism ethics issues, in-class discussion of other students' and the professor's presentations on ethics issues, two brief ethics decision memos and the production of a journalism review-style story about a current journalism ethics controversy.

COURSE STRUCTURE

There are a million specific (and some more general) journalism ethics issues the class could address. Because I want this course to be as relevant as possible to each of you, you'll all be involved in selecting topics, compiling resources (readings, data, statistics, examples and evidence), presenting and discussing relevant material on the issues we choose to cover. Regardless of your degree of interest in the specific topics, I expect you to be physically and mentally present EVERY day.

Class participation: Class discussion and debate are crucial to the success of this class. One purpose of class discussion is to reveal multiple perspectives on and understandings of course topics. You are expected to show professional courtesy to all other students at all times during the course. Differences of opinion are not only expected but healthy, and disagreement with others' statements and reasoning may occur. You are *expected* to challenge each other's arguments and reasoning – and mine, too, for that matter – as part of the class discussion. However, at all times, you should offer challenges and questions in a respectful, professional manner. Class participation is a significant component of your grade, so take seriously your responsibility to pay attention to ALL presentations and be prepared to offer thoughtful comments and questions.

Required readings: We'll only read one book this semester: Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's *Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload.* It's a pretty easy read, but I'll give you a few weeks to get through it.

Beyond that, you'll find a list of readings to get us started in the **Schedule** section of the syllabus and on the e-learning site. And after we decide which specific topics we'll address through student presentations, we will add other readings. Those I assign will go on the Sakai e-learning site for the course as well as on our Hackpad wiki; for student-assigned readings, we'll use the Hackpad site for links and scan in pdfs, if necessary, to add to the e-learning site. (More about that later).

Regardless of the format in which they're distributed, **you are expected to read all assigned materials BEFORE the class period to which they relate.**

Students may find it useful to consult some of these books:

Kovach & Rosenstiel: *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*

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Rosenstiel & Mitchell, *Thinking Clearly: Cases in Journalistic Decision-Making*
Merrill, *Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media*
Fallows, *Breaking the News* (from 1996, but in some ways even more relevant now)
Black, Steele & Barney: *Doing Ethics in Journalism* (also dated, but still useful)

Also worth a regular visit are the websites of the [Columbia Journalism Review](#) and the [American Journalism Review](#).

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Discussion topic proposal: After the second class meeting, everyone will be assigned to a 2-person team. Each team will then meet to select at least two journalism ethics issues to propose as class discussion topics. The issue you propose to discuss can be relatively general (e.g., How can journalists cover mass trauma events ethically?), or it can be more specific (e.g. Should the *Los Angeles Times* have published photos of U.S. soldiers posing with Afghan insurgent corpses?). Any topic the team proposes should be acceptable to BOTH team members because you'll only present one. The team then will produce a brief (1- to 2-page) summary for each topic proposed. Each summary proposal should include a background statement or introduction and an explanation of why this issue is important to the public. In addition, the proposals should indicate which topic the team prefers to present. I'll use these proposals to make certain no two teams are proposing the exact same topic; whenever possible, each team will be assigned to present its preferred topic. Keep in mind that part of your grade for the presentation will depend on getting your classmates engaged in discussing the topic, so you should either choose a topic you believe will have relatively broad interest and/or be certain that you can present a less inherently interesting topic in a compelling way.

2. Discussion topic presentation: Each team will be assigned a date on which to lead class discussion of the team's topic for about 50 minutes. The purpose of the presentation is to help everyone in the class understand the issues relevant to your topic and, in essence, to be better prepared to deal with related ethical dilemmas. I'll meet with each team before your presentation to offer advice on what to include in the presentation.

The date for your presentation may be determined by the "fit" of your topic with issues I'll be presenting, so you won't necessarily have any choice about when you present. If you have a MAJOR and reasonable conflict with the date you're assigned, I will *consider* allowing you to switch with another team. However, you are expected to be in class every day, so do not assume that you'll have the option of switching to a different day. We have some foundational material to cover early in the semester, so no one will be presenting TOO soon.

Each discussion team will assign two or three background readings (e.g. Blog posts, trade press articles, NPR segments, book chapters) for the class to do BEFORE your presentation so that everyone has some background on the topic when the discussion begins.

Presentation team members will evaluate each other's contributions to the discussion topic presentation, using a form I will provide, and these evaluations will figure into the grade each person receives for his/her discussion topic presentation. In other words, I'll begin by

assigning a grade to the team as a whole. But the score each individual actually receives may be higher or lower than the team grade depending on the peer evaluation.

3. Response papers: Each student will write two 5- to 7-page response papers discussing another student team's presentation, a guest speaker talk or material the instructor has presented. These papers will be evaluated based on the author's success in logically and coherently critiquing the arguments and evidence presented, incorporating ideas from the required readings (or other relevant literature) for that discussion topic, and generally demonstrating thoughtful consideration of the issue. **Response papers that do little more than summarize the arguments and evidence presented during the class discussion generally will receive C-level or lower grades.** The purpose of the response paper is to go BEYOND what was covered by the in-class discussion, perhaps taking a less-explored aspect of the debate to discuss in more detail. **Response papers are due within one week of the initial class discussion of the topic.**

4. Journalism review story: Each student will write either an article or a script discussing a journalism ethics topic, focusing on a topic selected by the student **and approved by the professor**. This should NOT be the same topic you are presenting in class, though it could be one of your back-up topics. The idea here is to produce a discussion of some journalism ethics topic such as one might find in [Columbia Journalism Review](#) or [American Journalism Review](#) or in an episode of NPR's [On the Media](#). The article/script should include an introduction to the problem or issue, something that answers the question, "Why should we care about this?" or "Why is this an important problem/issue?" A first draft is recommended, though not required. (Even a partial draft of the story will help you. Optional drafts are due by **Thursday, Nov. 8**, to give me time to review it and return it to you while you still have time to make changes for the final draft. **You will submit both the draft, if you choose to do one, and the final story in two forms – electronically (preferably as an emailed Word document) and in hard copy or a video/audio file.**

Options: Regardless of your background, you may choose to produce either a 2,500-word magazine article, one 5-minute audio or video segment (the final product) or scripts for two 5-minute audio or video segments. If you choose to do the two 5-minute segments, make sure you get approval for both topics you'll deal with. In any case, you will be required to have strong background information, multiple sources and clear, grammatically correct, and carefully edited writing. (If you prefer to produce your final story in the form of a series of blog posts, this may be acceptable, but you'll still need to be producing something comparable to the 2,500-word/10-minute script requirement.)

Components: The first step will be to complete and submit a **proposal** laying out exactly what you want to write about, why it's worth doing, and how you plan to complete the story/segment/etc. Who will you need to interview? How will you go about getting the necessary interviews? The point of this proposal is to demonstrate that what you're proposing is both worthwhile and feasible.

By mid-semester, each student should turn in a brief (2-page) **preliminary report** explaining what progress he/she has made, what problems you've run into, what changes you're considering in the project, etc.

The **final article/segment** will be due the last day of class. Each person will be expected to make an **oral presentation** of his or her article/segment during one of the last two class days. The advantage to presenting the first day is that you'll have a chance to adjust your project based on class feedback before turning in the final piece.

Students who are not presenting their projects are **required** to attend class on student presentation days; therefore, attendance will be taken these days. Missing class during other students' presentations will lower your class participation grade.

Late Assignment Policy

Discussion topic proposals CANNOT be late under any circumstances. The highest possible grade for the final project proposal and final project will drop one letter grade for each day (not class meeting) the paper is late.

THIS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE, SO PLEASE PLAN AHEAD!

4. Class participation: Because student involvement is vital to the success of this course, you are expected to play an active part in shaping this course and keeping it focused on the broad objectives. Obviously, this means you are expected to attend class regularly, to be in the classroom by the time class begins, to contribute to identifying relevant readings and other resources and to participate meaningfully in 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, tablet 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 to get online to further discussion in THIS class, leave your laptop closed during class.

GRADING

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

	<u>Points</u>
Attendance and participation	200
Discussion topic proposal	50
Discussion topic presentation	250
Response papers	100 (50 points each)
Final project proposal	50
Oral presentation of final project	50
Final project (article/script/story)	300

1000 points total

I use minus grades so that students whose work is superior are recognized for their higher performance.

Final grades will be based on these standard break-points:

A- = 90-93.9%	A = 94%+
B- = 80-83%	B=83.1-87% B+=87.1%-89.9%
C- = 70-73%	B=73.1-77% B+=77.1%-79.9%
D- = 60-63%	D=63.1-67% D+=67.1%-69.9%
E = 59.9% or lower.	

It is unlikely that the grades will be curved.

COURSE EVALUATION

The course evaluation will be conducted in class at some point during the final week of the term.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

For the communications professional, there hardly exists a graver crime than plagiarizing another writer's work. In short, it is YOUR responsibility to make certain you understand what constitutes plagiarism and to ensure that you give proper credit any time you draw on someone else's writing.

- **Do not rely on what you think you've learned before.** Prof. Mindy McAdam has put together an excellent [guide](#): The [plagiarism guide](#) all graduate students are required to read and sign also should be helpful to you. It WILL be relevant to what's expected in this class because I wrote the guide.
- ***If you have questions, ASK ME!*** There's no penalty for asking questions, but the penalties for plagiarism are severe, including **dismissal from the program**.
- **Treat Internet sources like any other book, journal article or other print source.** Make CERTAIN you copy down attribution information when you copy material from a website, EVEN if you're paraphrasing.
- **Upload ALL papers to the e-learning site and know that I will submit them to Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism.** I'll also want hard copies of all your papers.
- **DO NOT turn in to me ANY work you previously have submitted to another instructor or that you plan to submit for any other class at UF or any other institution.** If you want to write on a topic you've worked on before, that may be acceptable IF you discuss it with me and get permission IN ADVANCE.

Please see the UF Office of Student Judicial Affairs website for definitions of academic dishonesty (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>). The violations most likely to be potential problems for students in this class include plagiarism, misrepresentation and fabrication. It is YOUR responsibility to understand what kinds of actions are prohibited. If a

situation ever arises in which you think something you're contemplating MIGHT constitute one of these types of academic dishonesty, ASK BEFORE YOU DO IT. Apologies after the fact are extremely unlikely to resolve the problem for anyone.

OTHER COURSE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

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 have a disability that requires accommodation, please do not hesitate to request it.

Class attendance: I expect you to come to class and to be here on time every day. Class participation is required, and you can't participate if you're not here. Each student will be allowed a **maximum** of two absences, and then ONLY for legitimate reasons and ONLY if you've made arrangements with me in advance. (Legitimate reasons include a job interview, a professional career development workshop or some significant illness. Given that the class meets on Thursdays, your best friend's wedding is NOT a legitimate reason for missing class. Nor is being hung over or needing to work on an assignment for another class.) If you miss class without a legitimate reason or more than twice, you'll lose 2% off your final grade for each non-legitimate/excess absence.

Common courtesy: For heaven's sake, turn off your cell phone! Please also observe other rules of common courtesy, such as not speaking to your classmates (or yourself) when others are making a presentation, not falling asleep in class, etc.

A Note about Office Hours: As much as humanly possible, I will be available during my office hours. If you come by during office hours and I'm not in, look for a note -- I'm very likely to be back in 5 minutes or less. If you cannot meet with me during my office hours, please make an appointment. **Unless you have made an appointment in advance, please respect the fact that I need to attend to other tasks -- research, writing, planning for class, grading papers, meeting with other students, conducting committee work, etc., etc., etc., -- during my non-office hours.** Please do not be offended if you drop by unexpectedly and I ask you to make an appointment or come back during office hours. If you make an appointment and then can't keep it, please call or email me as soon as possible to let me know. I have an answering machine on my office phone, and I've given you my home phone number, where there's also an answering machine. After 8 p.m., please call my office number or email. Remember, if the answering machine picks up and you don't leave your telephone number or speak so rapidly that I can't decipher the number, I can't call you back!

COURSE SCHEDULE

Many of the readings here are hyperlinked (shown with underline). If there's no underline, the reading will be on the e-learning site, except for "Blur" (by Kovach & Rosenstiel). Note: Readings WILL be added over the course of the semester as we deal with different topics.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS DUE</u>
8/23	Introduction & discussion of assignments and expectations for the class. No readings.
8/30	<p>Why journalism ethics matters <i>State of the News Media 2012,</i> Read the Overview, Major Trends & Key Findings sections, along with any of the rest of the report that interests you. Pew, "Further decline in credibility ratings for most news organizations"</p> <p>Agenda-setting, framing, & gatekeeping theory McCombs & Reynolds, "How the News Shapes Our Civic Agenda;" Tewksbury & Scheufele, "News Framing Theory & Research;" These 2 chapters are available in e-book form here Cassidy, "Gatekeeping Similar for Print, Online Journalists"</p>
9/6 & 9/13	<p>Values & relativism – why can't we ALL be right? Elliott, "All is not relative"</p> <p>Critical thinking Kovach & Rosenstiel, "The Way of Skeptical Knowing;" Geisler, "Critical thinking: What do you mean by that?"</p> <p>Ethical approaches & reasoning BBC Ethics Guide. Read the sections on duty-based ethics and on consequentialism: Plaisance, "Ethics Theory Overview"</p> <p style="background-color: yellow;">Discussion topic proposals due 9/6</p>
9/20	<p>Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 1 Final project proposals due 9/20</p>
9/27	<p>Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 2</p>
10/4	<p>Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 3</p>

10/11	Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 4 Preliminary report on final project due in class
10/18	Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 5
10/25	Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 6
11/1	Student team presentation(s) Instructor topic 7
11/8	Student team presentation(s)8 Instructor topic 8 Drafts of final article/script due (optional)
11/15	Student final project presentations
11/22	Thanksgiving Break – Enjoy!!
11/29	Student final project presentations Final journalism ethics article or script due