

Ethics in Journalism

J352F/395 (Unique No. 07515/07660)

Spring 2018

Class: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-10:45 a.m., CMA 6.172

Professor: Robert Jensen

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We will examine ethical issues that arise in the day-to-day practice of journalism and also step back to ask whether contemporary news media institutions foster the deepest ethical practice possible. While we explore the ethical norms under which professional journalists work, we also will evaluate whether the structure and routines of professional journalism in the United States encourage or impede ethical practice by examining how well mainstream journalists cover crucial issues. And we'll try to understand how recent technological and political changes affect the practice of journalism in the United States.

This examination of the professional ethics of news media is grounded in the question, "What are journalists for?" There's a broad consensus among journalists that their claim to special status in a democratic society is based on their ability to provide the facts, analyses, and exposure to the range of opinions that people need to function as citizens. There also is broad dissatisfaction among the public with journalists' performance, for a variety of reasons. How can we best defend (when it's warranted) and improve (where needed) the work of journalists?

We'll ask questions about the nature of democracy, looking at standard political philosophy and contemporary critics. We'll ask questions about journalistic norms expressed in terms such as fairness, balance, objectivity, and neutrality, as part of an examination of the ideology of journalism. We'll identify economic, ecological, and political issues that should be at the center of the practice of ethical journalism and evaluate journalists' coverage of those issues.

The goal of this course is to help students develop a moral and political philosophy that can guide them in making career/life choices.

Computers and smartphones: Students may not use computers, smartphones, or other electronic devices during class except in cases involving special needs.

GRADES:

Your final grade will be based on:

1. three papers, 25 points each: 75 points
2. participation in class discussion: 15 points
3. presentation to the class: 10 points

A 94-100 / A- 90-93.5

B+ 87-89.5 / B 84-86.5 / B- 80-83.5

C+ 77-79.5 / C 74-76.5 / C- 70-73.5

D+ 67-69.5 / D 64-66.5 / D- 60-63.5

1. PAPERS:

Each paper should be 4 to 5 pages (double-spaced, no less than 1,000 words). Papers can refer to readings from the course and/or outside readings. The goal, however, is not a paper in which you catalog what others have written but one in which you articulate your own view, drawing on the work of others when appropriate.

There is no “right answer” to the questions posed in the writing assignments; you are presenting your analysis and conclusion. In formulating your ideas, you are encouraged to talk with others, but the writing must be your own. Plagiarism is bad. If you aren’t sure what plagiarism is, consult this website from UT Libraries, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/>. If you still aren’t sure, ask Jensen.

When you cite the work of others, use the format of the Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, or Chicago/Turabian. An easy program for generating bibliographies and reference lists is available at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/noodlebib/>. If you want to use a different citation style, ask Jensen.

Paper #1: What is democracy? What are the key features of a democratic society? What are the key moral/political principles on which your definition is based? Evaluate contemporary U.S. political culture in light of your definition.

Paper #2: What is journalism for? What kind of journalism can best enhance democracy? What are the key moral/political principles on which your definition is based? Evaluate contemporary mainstream, corporate-commercial journalism in light of your definition.

Paper #3: What is the moral responsibility of a journalist in the United States today? How does your answer shape your career/life plan?

2. PARTICIPATION:

This is a seminar, which means students are responsible for coming to class ready to participate. Read the material for the week before coming to class on Tuesday and be prepared to speak. I will ask questions. When fellow students are presenting, you also will be judged on your preparation and participation.

At the end of the semester I will judge your overall contribution to class discussion. This portion of your grade will be based on your: (a) familiarity with readings; (b) ability to hear and understand what others say; (c) ability to express yourself clearly; (d) ability to synthesize the thoughts of others to form new insights, conclusions, or questions; (e) ability to disagree constructively; and (f) cooperation in building a stimulating and supportive intellectual atmosphere in class.

Because part of your grade is based on class participation, it is obvious that attendance is crucial; you can’t participate if you aren’t there. Students can miss two classes without penalty. After that, I deduct two points for each absence.

3. PRESENTATION:

After spring break, students will be responsible for selecting readings/viewings for the class and leading discussion. We will discuss the details in class.

For graduate students:

MA students registered for J395 will complete additional writing assignments and presentations, based on the student’s interests. Talk to Jensen after the first class for more details.

READINGS:

Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). Chapter 3, “Ideas,” pp. 97-143. <https://codkashacabka.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/we-make-the-road-by-walking-myles-and-paulo-freire-book.pdf> (also on Canvas)

Lummis, Charles Douglas, “The Radicalism of Democracy,” *Democracy: A Journal of Political Renewal and Radical Change*, 2 (Fall 1982): 9-16. https://democracyjournalarchive.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/democracy-2-4_-oct-1982.pdf (also on Canvas)

Chomsky, Noam, “Government in the Future,” February 16, 1970. <http://tangibleinfo.blogspot.com/2006/11/noam-chomsky-lecture-from-1970-full.html> (also on Canvas)

Dewey, John, “Creative Democracy—The Task before Us,” in *John Dewey and the Promise of America*, Progressive Education Booklet No. 14 (Columbus, Ohio: American Education Press, 1939), pp. 12-17. <http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/mpsg/Essays/Dewey%20-%20Creative%20Democracy.pdf> (also on Canvas)

Dahl, Robert A., “The Past and the Future of Democracy,” (Siena, Italy: Centre for the Study of Political Change, Università degli Studi di Siena, 1999), pp. 1-20. http://www.circap.org/uploads/1/8/1/6/18163511/occ_5.pdf (also on Canvas)

Bonde, Sheila, and Paul Firenze, “Making Choices: A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions,” 2013. <http://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions> (also on Canvas)

Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2011). Chapter 1, “About Ethics,” pp. 1-15. (on Canvas)

Society of Professional Journalists, “Code of Ethics.” <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

Muller, Denis, *Journalism Ethics for the Digital Age* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2014). Chapters 3, 4, 5, 16. (ebook in UT library and on Canvas)

Rosenstiel, Tom, “What the post-Trump debate over journalism gets wrong,” Brookings Institution, December 20, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/what-the-debate-over-journalism-post-trump-gets-wrong/> (also on Canvas)

Jensen, Robert, “American journalism’s ideology: Why the ‘liberal’ media is fundamentalist,” *ZNet*, June 10, 2015. <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/american-journalisms-ideology-why-the-liberal-media-is-fundamentalist/> (also on Canvas)

Martinez, Elizabeth, and Arnoldo Garcia, "What is Neoliberalism? A Brief Definition for Activists," CorpWatch. <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=376> (also on Canvas)

Schweickart, David, "But What is Your Alternative?" in Anatole Anton and Richard Schmitt, eds., *Taking Socialism Seriously* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 47-66. (on Canvas)

Farley, Joshua, "Ecological Economics," in Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, eds., *The Post Carbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century's Sustainability Crises* (Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 2010). <http://www.postcarbon.org/publications/ecological-economics/> (also on Canvas)

Caradonna, Jeremy, "Is 'Progress' Good for Humanity?" *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/09/the-industrial-revolution-and-its-discontents/379781/>

Collings, David A., *Stolen Future, Broken Present: The Human Significance of Climate Change* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014). Introduction, pp. 7-22; and Chapter 1, "Climate Change Will Happen to You," pp. 23-40. (on Canvas)

Mann, Michael E., and Tom Toles, *The Madhouse Effect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Chapter 5, "The War on Climate Science," pp. 69-89. (on Canvas)

Grossman, Zoltán, "A Briefing on the History of U.S. Military Interventions," October 2001. <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/interventions.html> (also on Canvas)

McCoy, Alfred W., *In the Shadows of the American Century: The Rise and Decline of US Global Power* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), Chapter One, "The World Island and the Rise of America," pp. 27-59. (on Canvas)

Turse, Nick, "A Wider World of War," TomDispatch.com, December 14, 2017. http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176363/tomgram%3A_nick_turse%2C_a_wider_world_of_war/

Reference Reading:

--LaFollette, Hugh, and Ingmar Persson, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013). (ebook in UT library)

--*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/>

SCHEDULE
J352F/Spring 2018

WEEK 1: January 16 and 18

topic: "Are you, or have you ever been, an intellectual?"

reading: Horton and Freire

WEEK 2: January 23 and 25

topic: democracy: 20th century framework

reading: Lummis, Chomsky

viewing: "Noam Chomsky: America's Leading Dissenter," interview with Bill Moyers, 1988.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEYJMCydFNI>

WEEK 3: January 30 and February 1

topic: democracy: hopes and fears

reading: Dewey, Dahl

WEEK 4: February 6 and 8

paper #1 due on Thursday

topic: paper #1

viewing: "Our democracy no longer represents the people," Larry Lessig, TEDx, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJy8vTu66tE>

WEEK 5: February 13 and 15

topic: introduction to ethical thinking

reading: Bonde/Firenze, Singer

WEEK 6: February 20 and 22

topic: conventional journalism ethics

reading: SPJ Code of Ethics, Muller

WEEK 7: February 27 and March 1

topic: journalism: objective v. activist, prophetic v. apocalyptic

reading: Rosenstiel, Jensen

WEEK 8: March 6 and 8

paper #2 due on Thursday

topic: paper #2

SCHEDULE
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Spring Break: March 12-16

WEEK 9: March 20 and 22

topic: covering economics ethically

reading: Martinez/Garcia, Schweickart, Farley

WEEK 10: March 27 and 29

topic: covering ecological crises ethically

reading: Caradonna, Collings, Mann

WEEK 11: April 3 and 5

topic: covering the world ethically

reading: Grossman, McCoy, Turse

viewing: "Firing Line," Noam Chomsky interview with William F. Buckley, Jr., 1969.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DvmLMUfGss>

WEEK 12: April 10 and 12

paper #3 due on Thursday

topic: paper #3

WEEK 13: April 17 and 19

student presentations:

WEEK 14: April 24 and 26

student presentations:

WEEK 15: May 1 and 3

student presentations:

**There is no final exam in this class.*

Ethics codes online

Society of Professional Journalists, with links to other codes

<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode-other.asp>

Online News Association

http://journalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ona_code_of_ethics_2010_03.pdf

Social Newsgathering Ethics Code

<https://toolkit.journalists.org/social-newsgathering/>

“Build Your Own Ethics Code”

<http://journalists.org/resources/build-your-own-ethics-code/>

Ethical Journalism Network

<http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/>

Center for Investigative Reporting/Reveal

<https://www.revealnews.org/ethics-guide/>

NPR

<http://ethics.npr.org/>

Associated Press Managing Editors

<http://www.apme.com/?page=EthicsStatement>

Radio Television Digital News Association

http://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics#.VXnxZoasiFx

National Press Photographers Association

https://nppa.org/code_of_ethics

American Society of Magazine Editors

<http://www.magazine.org/asme/editorial-guidelines>

American Society of Business Publication Editors

<http://www.asbpe.org/guide-to-preferred-editorial-practices>

National Association of Science Writers

<https://www.nasw.org/nasw-code-ethics>

American Medical Writers Association

http://www.amwa.org/page/Code_of_Ethics

Society for News Design

<http://www.snd.org/about/code-of-ethics/>

Public Relations Society of America

<https://www.prsa.org/ethics/code-of-ethics/>

American Association of Advertising Agencies

<https://ams.aaa.org/eweb/upload/inside/standards.pdf>

UNIVERSITY POLICIES and INFORMATION

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University.
http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

University of Texas Honor Code: The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Religious Holy Days: A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at ssd@austin.utexas.edu; (512) 471-6259 (voice); or (512) 410-6644 (videophone). <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

Helpful UT Resources:

Sanger Learning Center: <https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc>

Center for Strategic Advising & Career Counseling: <https://ugs.utexas.edu/vick>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Public Speaking Center: <https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc/support/speaking-center>

Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>