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  
Office: BMC 3.304; 471-1990  
Office Hours: Wednesday, 9:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m., and by appointment  
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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:


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


Reference Reading:
SCHEDULE
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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
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
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
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
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/