

J352F/395-23

Spring 2014

Ethics of Journalism

08475/08260

Class: Monday 9 am - Noon CMA 6.146

Professor: Dr. Renita Coleman, Ph.D.

Office: BMC 3.330

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and by appointment

Phones: Office – 471-1969. Cell; to be given out in class

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Textbooks:

Patterson, P., & Wilkins, L. *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Latest Edition*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Bok, S. *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*. Vintage.

Additional, required reading will be available on Canvas.

Overview:

This is a class in applied ethics, that is, we are concerned with how ethical principles can be used to guide conduct, specifically, by journalists. Through class discussion, films, and journalistic writing such as editorials and analysis pieces, we will explore ethical issues in the media in some depth. This class will not waste time on what I call the “ethical no-brainers” such as whether it is OK to make up stories a la Jayson Blair. Instead, we will explore true ethical dilemmas, those situations where there is no one clear right or wrong answer, but instead a variety of choices, sometimes none of them very good ones. We will consider what to do when values and loyalties conflict – when you can either tell the truth or protect someone’s privacy but not both, for example. Ethical questions in a variety of contexts will be considered – for example, how much information should the mass media provide about the private lives of public figures and private figures? What is appropriate news coverage of “needy causes”? What is and should be the influence of competition and the profit motive on news? Do broadcasters, print and online journalists have different responsibilities? Bring your own questions to class and we will explore those too.

We also will explore classical ethical theory from an applied perspective, where the tried-and-true principles from classical ethical theory will be used as a framework to guide actions on specific journalism dilemmas. You will use these principles as foundations upon which to base your decisions, combined with professional values and principles, and your own internal moral compass. These classical principles and professional codes will be brought together in the subject of moral development, or how one grows to become a moral adult, from the field of psychology.

In the course of this, you will learn about some famous journalism ethics cases from history by watching movies – Woodward & Bernstein’s coverage of Watergate in *All the President’s Men*, and the case of CBS and the tobacco whistle-blower incident in *The Insider*. *Absence of Malice* is fictitious, but the real test of libel is accurately portrayed in this movie along with a host of ethical dilemmas (most of them no-brainers). We will cover current ethical questions, such as the press’ role in the Edward Snowden NSA leaks, use of the subway victim’s photo, and the picture of the Sandy Hook victim’s sister. As ethical questions occur throughout the semester (and they always do), we will take them up, altering our schedule as necessary. Please bring to class any ethics cases that you see happening!

Course goals:

At the end of this course you will:

- Know some of the major classical and contemporary ethical philosophies such as those of Aristotle, Kant, Mills, Rawls, and Bok and be able to apply those theories to practical ethical decision-making.
- Have gained some decision-making tools and models that will help you make more comprehensive and better quality decisions in your career and life.
- Understand how people grow and develop morally throughout their lives, and how and where journalists are situated in that spectrum.
- Understand the basic and specific ethical tenets of the journalism and mass communication professions and be able to apply them to real-life dilemmas.
- Have analyzed real-world ethical dilemmas and arrived at a course of action and justification for news audiences.

Grading:

The course grade will be based on the following:

Four Written papers	60% (15% each)
Midterm exam	20%
Participation	20%

Graduate Credit: Professional master’s students will do one additional paper. Details will be discussed in class. It will be due anytime before the last day of class. The grading will be as follows:

Four Written papers	60% (15% each)
Additional graduate credit paper	5%
Midterm exam	20%
Participation	15%

Ph.D. students will write a critical essay in lieu of the four written papers and graduate credit paper (65%); participation and the midterm will be the same. In addition, Ph.D. students will have extra readings, and will choose one ethical philosopher and read the original work (eg: John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, or Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*); this will be incorporated into the critical essay. See me for details.

Except under unusual circumstances, I return papers, graded, within one week of the due date. If you do not receive your graded paper for some reason (you came in late, after they were handed back, I lost it, etc.), be sure to ask me for it within one week of the time I return them. If you do not have a grade on Canvas for a paper that has been graded and returned, see me within one week of the date I returned them. If I do not hear from you within one week after the paper has been handed back, I will assume you did not turn in that assignment and have accepted a grade of zero. Keep all your graded papers that have been handed back should your grade not appear on Canvas. I will not re-grade papers at the end of the semester.

Writing assignments: You will apply what you have learned in class to work through the various issues in the situation to arrive at a compelling argument for (or against) the ethicality of a course of action. You will begin by using Bok's decision-making model to work through one of the ethical choices in the film *Absence of Malice*. Next, you will use the Potter Box to reason through one of the ethical decisions in *The Insider*. Finally, you will apply Bok's ideas on lying to justify (or not) some action from *All the President's Men*. The last assignment is to produce, in conjunction with one other student, a presentation on some aspect of digital journalism. A short written paper will accompany your presentation.

Midterm exam; A fact-based, multiple-choice, true-false deal to make sure you are retaining the information necessary to base good ethical decisions upon. Concentrate especially on the ethical philosophers. We will have a review. The best way to prepare is to keep up with the readings and come to class. Trying to digest all this material right before the test is not a good plan. It takes some time to really 'get' these philosophies.

Participation: Participation is assessed in 2 ways that are linked – by the reflection papers you write and by your contributions to class discussion. Do all of the readings before class and write a reflection paper related to the readings. Bring to class *in person*; do not email to me. I will not accept them by email, under my door, in my mailbox, by courier/friend or other delivery methods, or after class is over. This will help you come prepared for in-class discussion. Note: these two are linked; if you do not come to class, you cannot get participation points just by doing the readings and writing the paper but not showing up and contributing. There are 10 reflection papers; you are only required to do 7 of your choice. So, there is already some leeway built in for being unable to attend all classes. All students will be expected to contribute to class discussion with insightful questions, informed opinions, and intelligent comments.

I do appreciate your telling me when you plan to miss a class; it shows you are a considerate person; however, it does not excuse you from the above rule – if you miss a class (even if you tell me ahead of time) and therefore cannot turn in a reflection paper, you will receive a zero for that day's participation. Obviously, if you miss too many classes (I estimate roughly 25%), even for excused absences such as illness, then you will need to drop the class and take it later.

There is a handout on how to do the reflection papers. The exception to this is the first one; for it you will write two double-spaced typed pages on an ethical dilemma, problem, or situation you have faced some time in your life that tested your own ethical values. Explain how you resolved it and why. How might you have handled it differently? This need not be connected to journalism. Do not write anything you are not willing to share with the class.

A word about writing: Ethics, more than most subjects, demands clear, thoughtful communication. The course contains a large element of logic, which is appropriate because formal ethical theory springs from the logical traditions of philosophy. Grades will be based on rigorous thought, coherent argument, and use of understandable language. Doing ethics relies heavily on critical thinking, and your written work will be judged on your ability to think critically via your expression of those thoughts. The journalistic writing components of this class requires you to adhere to AP style and the norms of journalistic writing such as ledes, nut grafs, transitions, attribution style, etc. If you are unsure what these are, please see me. Type and double-space everything.

Make-ups, late and missed deadlines: This is journalism, and the one thing we value most after truth-telling is the deadline. Therefore, turn in all assignments on the day they are due at the beginning of class, in class, unless otherwise specified. Late assignments and those turned in by email, my mailbox, under my office door, etc. will not be accepted and will result in a grade of zero. You will not be allowed to make up assignments whose deadline you miss. The only exceptions to the no-make-ups rule are death in your immediate family, incapacitating illness, and UT approved special curricular requirements. All of these require official documentation. Routine medical appointments, jobs, job interviews, research for class assignments, family problems, family members' illness, your own illnesses that are below the threshold of medical intervention, transportation issues, emotional distress, relationship crises, bad weather, computer difficulties, picking someone up at the airport, etc., are not UT approved absences. If you know you will need to miss a class when something is due, turn the assignment in BEFORE that class begins (with the exception of reflection papers; they must be accompanied by your presence in class that day). The value of this class comes from in-person participation in the class discussions; therefore, if you miss more than 1/4th of the classes, even with a doctor's note, you will be asked to drop and retake the course later. It is my belief that you just cannot learn to 'do ethics' adequately via correspondence course.

Final grades

A = 90-100

B = 80-89.99

C = 70-79.99

D = 60-69.99

F = below 60 points

Please note that I do not "round up." An 89.99 is still a B; it takes a full 90 earned points to receive an A. I do not use the plus/minus system.

Grades are based on the final product, not the amount of time or effort put in or how hard you tried. If you believe I have made a mistake in a grade, or do not understand something about your grade, please see me within one week of receiving your grade. No grade changes will be considered after this deadline.

I am happy to help you in any way I can. I want each of you to do your best in this class, learn something interesting you never knew before, and even have FUN!

Canvas

This will be the first class where I have used Canvas to distribute course materials, communicate and collaborate online, and post grades, among other things. I'll be learning it along with you. The schedule is subject to change and with it, the readings and dates assignments are due. You are responsible for keeping up with the latest schedule, readings, and due dates by checking the schedule posted on Canvas.

Students with disabilities

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. A documented disability statement from Services for Students with Disabilities must be provided to me in the first week of class and all regulations of SSD followed. For more information, contact the Services for Students with disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

University Honor Code

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 both instructors. This also applies to things you produce for media outlets such as the *Daily Texan*. You must always cite words and ideas that are not your own. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and those on the Student Judicial Services website, and must adhere to them. 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. Visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

Schedule Spring 2014*

**This schedule is subject to change*

Week	Date	Topic	Assignments	Readings
1	Jan. 13	Introduction News values & codes of ethics MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail	Reflection paper 1 – your own personal dilemma due Jan. 27	
2	Jan. 20	MLK Day – No Class		
3	Jan. 27	Personal dilemmas discussion Classical ethical theory	Reflection paper 1 due today (personal dilemma)	Patterson Ch. 2 (information ethics) Patterson Ch. 1 (intro to ethical decision making) & pp. 134-135 (Rawls); Mill, Aristotle's Golden Mean, W. D. Ross readings on Canvas
4	Feb. 3	Comunitarianism Decision-making models; Bok's model Film: Absence of Malice	Reflection paper 2 on Ch. 11 (Communitarianism, Bok chapter) due today 1 st essay on Absence of Malice due Feb. 17	Communitarianism reading on Canvas Patterson Pg 4-7; Bok Ch. 7
5	Feb. 10	Film: Absence of Malice With discussion at end		
6	Feb. 17	Moral development Conflict of Interest	1 st paper on Absence of Malice due Reflection paper 3	Patterson Ch. 11 (Becoming a Moral Adult) & readings on Canvas

		Potter Box	on Ch. 11 (Moral Adult) & readings on Canvas due today 2 nd paper on The Insider due Mar. 17	Day chapter on Canvas (Conflict of Interest) FIND SOMETHING BETTER
7	Feb. 24	Film: The Insider	PhD students essay proposal due 1-2 pages with 1- problem, 2- importance, 3- theory/theories	
8	Mar. 3	Discuss The Insider Loyalty & Privacy Stereotyping & Diversity Visual Ethics	Reflection paper 5 on Ch. 4, 5, or 8 due	Patterson Ch. 4 (loyalty) & Ch. 5 (privacy); Ch. 8 (Picture This)
9	Mar. 10	Spring Break – No Class		
10	Mar. 17	Lying – 1 Investigative Reporting Review for Midterm Exam	The Insider paper due today Reflection paper 6 on Bok 1-6 & 8, & Reflection Paper 7 on Custodians of Conscience due today	Bok 1-6 & 8 Custodians of Conscience (on Canvas)
11	Mar. 24	Midterm Exam		
12	Mar. 31	Guest Speaker: TBA Midterm essay question due; answers review Lying part 2	Reflection paper 8 on Bok 9-16 due today	Bok 9-16
13	Apr. 7	Film: All the President's Men	3 rd paper on All the President's Men due Apr. 21	

			PhD students' critical essay draft due	
14	Apr. 14	Discuss All the President's Men Group project on digital journalism assigned	Group project presentation on digital journalism due April 28	
15	Apr. 21	Public Relations ethics Richard Jewell case	3 rd paper on All the President's Men due today Reflection Paper 10, TARES test or Jewell reading due today	TARES test reading & handout, on Canvas; Richard Jewell video and reading on Canvas
16	Apr. 28	Ethics and Digital Journalism (class presentations)	Ph.D. students final essay due today	Patterson Ch. 9 (New Media)