

Ethics in Journalism

J395 (Unique No. 08100)

Spring 2016

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 the contemporary professional news media's institutions and ideology are consistent with 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.

This examination of the professional ethics of news media starts with 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 opinions that people need to function as citizens. What are the implications of that claim for professional journalists' ethical decision-making, and what are the ethical implications for the organization of professional journalism?

Our inquiry will start with questions about the nature of democracy, looking at standard political philosophy and contemporary critics. We will identify issues that should be central to ethical journalism and evaluate journalists' coverage of those issues. The final segment of the course will challenge students to develop a philosophy that can guide them in making career/life choices.

GRADES:

Your final grade will be based on:

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

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Papers:

Each paper should be 4 to 6 pages (double-spaced, 1,000 to 1,500 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.

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/>.

Paper #1: What is democracy? What are the key moral principles on which your definition is based?

Paper #2: What are journalists' ethical obligations in covering (choose one) (1) economics and business, (2) foreign policy and military affairs, or (3) environmental issues and ecological crises?

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. Presentation:

After spring break, students (alone, or with partners) will be responsible for selecting readings for the class and leading discussion about topics that will be based on the work for the second writing assignment. We will discuss the details in class.

3. 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.

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. I will handle folks who miss class on a case-by-case basis. If you have to miss a class and have a good excuse, let me know.

4. Graduate Student Assignment

MA students will complete an extra assignment to earn graduate credit in the course. We will meet early in the semester to discuss the subject and form of that assignment.

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://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>

Helpful UT Resources:

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

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

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

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

READINGS:

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)

Miller, David, *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). (available at University Co-op)

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)

Chomsky, Noam, *Democracy and Power: The Delhi Lectures* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2014). Chapter 1, "World Orders, Old and New." <http://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/300/democracy-and-power--the-delhi-lectures>

Wright, Erik Olin, "Transforming Capitalism through Real Utopias," *American Sociological Review*, 78:1 (2013): 1-25. (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/>

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)

Kingsnorth, Paul, and Hine, Dougal, "Dark Mountain Manifesto," 2009. <http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/> (also on Canvas)

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

Center for Investigative Reporting, "Ethics Guide." <http://cironline.org/ethics-guide>

NPR, "Ethics Handbook." <http://ethics.npr.org/>

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, "Hope and the Historian," *The Atlantic*, December 10, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/hope-and-the-historian/419961/>

Trebilcot, Joyce, *Dyke Ideas: Process, Politics, Daily Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). "Ethics of Method: Greasing the Machine and Telling Stories," pp. 59-66. (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/>

SCHEDULE
J352F/Spring 2016

WEEK 1: January 19 and 21

topic: introduction to ethical thinking
reading: Bonde and Firenze

WEEK 2: January 26 and 28

topic: democracy and freedom
reading: Miller, Chapters 1-4

WEEK 3: February 2 and 4

topic: democracy and justice
reading: Miller, Chapters 5-7

WEEK 4: February 9 and 11

paper #1 due on Tuesday
topic: paper #1
documentary: "The People Speak"

WEEK 5: February 16 and 18

topic: covering the world ethically
reading: Grossman, Chomsky

WEEK 6: February 23 and 25

topic: covering economics ethically
reading: Wright, Farley

WEEK 7: March 1 and 3

topic: covering ecological crises ethically
reading: Collings, Kingsnorth and Hine

WEEK 8: March 8 and 10

paper #2 due on Tuesday
topic: paper #2
documentary: "Surviving Progress"

SCHEDULE
J352F/Spring 2016

Spring Break: March 14-18

WEEK 9: March 22 and 24

topic: journalism ethics

reading: Society of Professional Journalists, Center for Investigative Reporting, NPR

WEEK 10: March 29 and 31

student presentations:

reading:

WEEK 11: April 5 and 7

student presentations:

reading:

WEEK 12: April 12 and 14

student presentations:

reading:

WEEK 13: April 19 and 21

paper #3 due on Tuesday

topic: paper #3

documentary: "Is the Man Who Is Tall Happy?"

WEEK 14: April 26 and 28

topic: faith, hope, love

reading: Coates, Trebilcot

WEEK 15: May 3 and 5

topic: "They wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" - Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900).

reading: Jensen

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

Ethics codes online

Links to codes of ethics

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

Ethical Journalism Network

<http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/en>

Online News Association

http://journalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ona_code_of_ethics_2010_03.pdf
“Build Your Own Ethics Code”
<http://journalists.org/resources/build-your-own-ethics-code/>

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/amwa_ethics

Society for News Design

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

Public Relations Society of America

http://www.prsa.org/aboutUs/ethics/preamble_en.html

American Association of Advertising

<http://www.aaaa.org/about/association/pages/standardsofpractice.aspx>