

Media Ethics  
JOUR 6708-M50  
Fall 2011  
5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Mondays  
Online Synchronous Class

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“Classical approaches to ethics presented with their application to the day-to-day considerations journalism, public relations and advertising professionals must face in working with employers, local publics and the larger society which depends on a free flow of accurate information.”

Media practitioners make ethical decisions everyday in the workplace. A public relations specialist advises a client to make full disclosure to the community after an industrial accident. A reporter and her editor decide to name an alleged rape victim when the accused is well known. A broadcaster refuses to reveal the name of a confidential source to a grand jury and goes to jail. A digital journalist has a compelling story from online sources and feels compelled to repost it on her news site. An advertiser chooses not to run commercials during a highly rated television program because the show contains scenes of explicit violence and sex. On what basis do news journalists or advertisers or public relations professionals decide the right thing to do?

Compounding the media professional's decision-making is the rapidly changing media environment. This course reexamines traditional values of journalism in light of the changes created by the practice of journalism in the new media environment. Reporting news online and in social media presents new ethical and legal questions for professional journalists as well as for the new breed of citizen bloggers. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media are increasingly being used by journalists as tools for reporting, covering a beat, developing community with readers and sources, and promoting stories on news web sites. As journalists move from reporting news in traditional broadcast and print media to posting and promoting news using online sites, news blogs and social media tools, how have the standards for journalists changed? What challenges to verification, accuracy and independence do journalists face as they engage the immediacy and intimacy of digital reporting? Public relations and advertising practitioners have new opportunities to communicate messages directly to their audience via the Internet and social media. These often give rise to issues of transparency about the source of the information about the organization, product or service being promoted.

Today journalism is not only practiced with new media platforms but also done in a new economic environment. How does a media professional balance ethical concerns against the compelling institutional interest in making money given the fragmentation of media audiences? And how do we maintain the quality of our work given the substantial reductions in workforce at most media organizations? News organizations are struggling to survive the current economic

recession, the fragmenting audience and the disappearing advertising revenue stream. Can we afford traditional news ethics? What do we sacrifice if we abandon these standards?

The purpose of the course is to teach you how to weigh the values and demands implicit in media practice over against the values that underlie society. You are forced to examine your own personal values and test how those values play out in your professional practice. Each student is asked to develop his or her own code of professional media practice. The class also asks you to consider your life's work in the context of the societal good.

In this course, you will learn how to analyze ethical dilemmas of media practice. First, you will learn elementary principles of moral philosophy. Second, you will apply those principles to professional decisions. Third, you will analyze ethical dilemmas faced by media professionals. In particular, you will analyze ethical dilemmas in gathering and disseminating news and practicing public relations and advertising. Objectives of this course include learning how to tolerate disagreement, increasing respect for ethnic and gender diversity, and developing sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of your professional practice.

### **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOUR4708 MASS MEDIA ETHICS**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.

### **PREREQUISITE:**

None

### **REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:**

Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases*, McGraw-Hill, 7th edition, 2011. The textbook will be supplemented by articles available on the web and other readings distributed in class. Most of these articles can be accessed through the links in the online syllabus under Course Content in the eCourseware site.

### **HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET:**

#### **Cognitive Objectives To Be Mastered (Ability To Explain, Analyze, Understand, Think Critically):**

- Students will understand fundamental principles of moral philosophy and learn to apply those principles to professional decision-making;
- Students will analyze ethical dilemmas confronted by media professionals;
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity – gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation and develop respect for ethnic and gender diversity;
- Students will gain a sense of moral responsibility in their professional practice.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

**Performance Standards To Be Met (Demonstrable Skills, Abilities, Techniques, Applied Competencies):**

- Students will participate in class discussions in which they apply appropriate ethical principles to specific media problems/issues.
- Students will analyze and present to the class a case study of an ethical dilemma;
- Students will apply appropriate ethical principles to specific media problems/issues
- Students will develop professional standards appropriate to the student’s area media practice;
- Students will write a semester paper in which they analyze a media ethics case problem.
- Students will develop a personal code of ethics in which they articulate professional standards and practices appropriate to their chosen area of media practice.

**HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET FOR JOUR4708 MASS MEDIA ETHICS:**

- Students will be assessed for their contributions to the discussion of ethical dilemmas and their leadership in a classroom presentation of a case study.
- Students will be assessed in their comprehension of appropriate ethical principles and their application to media ethical dilemmas in their writing of in-class, closed-book, essay exams.
- Student semester papers will be assessed for analysis professional ethical dilemmas and application of appropriate ethical principles to mass communication practices and issues.

**CLASSROOM FORMAT:**

Combination of lecture, discussion and student presentations.

**GRADING:**

Case leadership	10 %
Exam 1	20
Exam 2	20
Final	20
Student Semester Paper	20
<u>Preparation (quiz)/Participation</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	100 %

Number grades on tests translate into these letter grades: A, 90-100; B, 80-89; C, 70-79; D, 60-69; F, below 60.

- A - Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue.
- B - Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.
- C – An average performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that, while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.
- D - A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The D grade states that the

student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.

F - For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant an adviser's questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken. Of course, the most likely way to receive an F is to miss classes and not complete the course requirements.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Analyze a case and lead the discussion (10% of grade):**

Choose a case study listed in the **Class/Assignment Schedule** below (these cases are from the Patterson and Wilkins text) and lead the class discussion of the case. Students will begin leading cases on Monday, Sept. 19, 2011. You should choose a case that reflects your professional interests. Once you select your case, you will be assigned the date for your case presentation by your instructor.

Preparation for the presentation includes a careful reading of the assigned material related to the case, outside research on the particular case (if it is based on a genuine event and is not a hypothetical case study) and outside reading on the case's ethics topic (you might want to look for similar real-life ethical dilemmas and how they were handled), and designation of the different roles in leading the case discussion. Creative presentations earn style points. You will have approximately 20 minutes for the presentation.

### **Write a focus paper arising out of dilemma in the case the student leads (20%):**

Each student will write an individual paper, a written analysis of the ethical issues presented by the case the student leads. Your paper should be a minimum 2,000 words, which equals about eight pages, double-spaced. The paper will discuss the major ethics issues raised in the case and indicate how you would resolve the questions if you were faced with the scenario. This is not a "How do I feel about the issue" paper, but a careful analysis in which you apply the philosophical principles and ethical models you learn in this class to the issues of the case and cite relevant statements from authorities in media practice and ethics. Most of the cases are real-life events. Your outside research might locate additional information about the event, and you can include it in your paper and presentation. You will want to find articles discussing the media ethics issues raised by the case such as invasion of privacy of grief victims, stereotypes in advertising, and deception in public relations information. I'm happy to discuss your ideas for the paper.

You should read and cite in the text of the paper *at least* six sources (other than your textbooks and assigned articles), either magazine articles, journal articles, books or web information relevant to your case/topic. No more than three of the six sources should be online-only web citations/sources. The journalism department reading room and the University of Memphis library have a wealth of media trade publications (online as well as hard-copy) such as *Columbia Journalism Review* and *Advertising Age* as well as academic publications such as *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. Also, feel free to visit the Poynter Institute web site, [pointer.org](http://pointer.org), where ethical issues are regularly discussed

This paper's style must conform to the American Psychological Association reference style. Style guides are available in the bookstore and the library as well as online. The **Online Writing Lab (OWL)** at Purdue University offers an excellent presentation of the American Psychological Association reference style as well as a range of resources on the writing process. See the left-hand navigation menu for "Research and Citation," and then click "APA Style."  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> . **Papers are due Nov. 21, but you are welcome to submit them earlier.**

### **Exams (60%):**

Exam 1: Monday, Sept. 26  
Exam 2: Monday, Nov. 14  
Final exam: Monday, Dec. 19, (Tentative)

### **Preparation (quiz)/Participation (10% of grade):**

Read all assigned materials. You will have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the material when the professor calls on you to discuss the content of the readings in class. You may be asked to take a simple quiz on the readings (simple, of course, to those who have read the assignment).

Participate in class discussions. The instructor will evaluate your participation for the final grade. Each absence over two will lower your participation grade by one point. If you're absent, you can't participate.

No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements acceptable to your professor unless an absence is due to illness or catastrophic emergency that can be documented. This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be online on time just as you would elsewhere.

### **Class/Assignment Schedule:**

**The instructor reserves the right to change the schedule with notice in advance of assignments. Cellular phones must be turned off during class.**

#### **Monday, Aug. 29: Introduction and orientation, Nature of ethical inquiry.**

*Patterson*, chapter 1, "Introduction to Ethical Decision Making," pp. 1-7, 17-20.

**Case 8-D, Above the Fold, pp. 224-228.**

#### **Monday, Sept. 12: Relevant philosophers.**

*Patterson*, chapter 1, "Introduction to Ethical Decision Making," pp. 7-16.:

#### **Discussion of case/paper assignments.**

**Choose case in Patterson and Wilkins that you would like to lead.**

#### **Monday, Sept. 19: Nature of truth.**

*Patterson*, chapter 2, "Information Ethics: A Profession Seeks the Truth," pp. 21-36.

**Case 2-E, When Is Objective Reporting Irresponsible Reporting? pp. 50-51.**

#### **News organizations' codes of ethics.**

Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, available at  
[http://www.spj.org/ethics\\_code.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp); Radio-Television News Directors Association Code of Ethics

and Professional Conduct, available at [http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media\\_items/code-of-ethics-and-professional-conduct48.php](http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media_items/code-of-ethics-and-professional-conduct48.php)

**Case 4-D, Conflicted Interests, Contested Terrain, pp. 113-115.**

**Monday Sept. 26: First Exam:**

**Deception.**

Mark Lisher, "Lying to Get the Truth," American Journalism Review, Oct/Nov 2007, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4403>

Robert Lissit, "Gotcha," American Journalism Review March 1995, available at <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=1433>

**Plagiarism.**

U of Memphis Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Student Handbook's Statement on Academic Misconduct, available at

<http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs/pdf/csrr.pdf>

Jill Rosen, "Who Knows Jack?" American Journalism Review, April/May 2004, available at <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=3613>

**Case 2-A. What's Yours is Mine: Ethics of News Aggregation, pp. 38-40.**

**Monday, Oct. 3: Promises of confidentiality: Promises to keep, promises to break.**

Ben Bagdikian, "When the Post Banned Anonymous Sources," American Journalism Review, Aug./Sept. 2005, available online at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=3946>

Paul McMasters and Geoffrey Stone, "Do Journalists Need a Better Shield Law," First Amendment Center web site, <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/commentary.asp?id=14547>

**Case 2-D. The Spouse is Squeezed: A S.C. TV Reporter's Attempt to Conceal Her Source, pp 47-49.**

**Public relations truth.**

Martinson, David, "'Truthfulness' in communication is both a reasonable and achievable goal for public relations practitioners." *Public Relations Quarterly* 41.n4 (Winter 1996): 42(4).

**Case 3-I, NY Times Sudan "Advertorial": Blood Money or Marketplace of Ideas, pp. 90-93.**

**Monday, Oct. 10: Loyalties and the Potter Box.**

*Patterson*, chapter 4, "Loyalty," pp. 94-103.

**Case 4-E, Freebies and the Houston Rodeo, pp. 116-118.**

**Conflict of interest: Non-participation policies for journalists.**

Kim Mills, "Taking it to the Streets," American Journalism Review, July/Aug. 1993, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=1462>.

**Case 4-B, Where Everybody Knows Your Name, pp. 107-109.**

**Privacy.**

*Patterson*, chapter 5, "Privacy," pp. 122-135.

**Case 5-C. Blind Justice? On Naming Kobe Bryant's Accuser after the Rape Charge Is Dropped, pp. 142-144.**

**Monday, Oct. 17: Fall Break**

**Monday Oct. 24: Influence of Economic Pressures on News.**

*Patterson*, chapter 7, "Media Economics," pp. 179-191.

**Case 7-B, Profit Versus News: The Case of the L.A. Times and the Tribune Company, pp. 195-197.**

**No News is Bad News: Finding an Economic Model to Pay for Gathering and Reporting News**

Rachel Smolkin, "Cities without Newspapers," *American Journalism Review*, June/July 2009, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4781>

Rem Rieder, "Fears for the Future: Who Will Pay for America's News." *American Journalism Review*, June/July 2009, <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4786>

**Case 7-D, Punishing the Messenger: The Tobacco Industry and the Press, pp. 200-201.**

**Monday, Oct. 31: Diversity.**

Bryan Monroe, "Newsroom Diversity: Truth vs. Fiction," *Nieman Reports*, Fall 2003, available at <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101000>

Dori J. Maynard, "Why Journalists Can't Talk Across Race," *Nieman Reports*, Fall 2003, available at <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101005>

**Case 4-F. Cross-Cultural Sensitivity and Reporting, pp. 119-121.**

**Monday, Nov. 7: Reporting politics and government.**

*Patterson*, chapter 6, "Mass Media in a Democratic Society," pp. 147-159.

**Reporting war and propaganda.**

Charles Layton, "Miller Brouhaha," *American Journalism Review*, Aug/Sept 2003, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=3057>

**Case 6-C, Painful Images of War: Too Painful for Whom? pp. 166-169.**

**What's Different about Publishing Online?**

*Patterson*, chapter 9, "New Media: Continuing Questions and New Roles," 242-254.

**Case 9-B, What Were You Linking, pp. 258-260.**

**Monday, Nov. 14: Exam 2**

**Photojournalism ethics.**

*Patterson*, chapter 8, "Picture This," pp. 205-215.

National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics, available at [http://www.nppa.org/professional\\_development/business\\_practices/ethics.html](http://www.nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html).

**Case 8-B, Problem Photos and Public Outcry, pp. 219-221.**

**Monday, Nov. 21: Research papers due**

**Social Media, Blogging and Citizen Journalists**

Paul Farhi, "The Twitter Explosion," *American Journalism Review*, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4772>

Radio Television Digital News Association, "Social Media and Blogging Guidelines," [http://www.rtdna.org/pages/media\\_items/social-media-and-blogging-guidelines1915.php?g=37?id=1915](http://www.rtdna.org/pages/media_items/social-media-and-blogging-guidelines1915.php?g=37?id=1915) .

**Monday, Nov. 28: Social Media (continued)**

**Case 9-G, Looking for Truth Behind the Wal-Mart Blogs, pp. 270-272.**

**Persuasive communications ethics**

*Patterson*, chapter 3, "Strategic Communications," pp. 55-66.

**Case 3-B, Tailgate Approved? The Rise and Fall of Fan Can, pp. 70-72**

**Monday, Dec. 5: Public relations ethics.**

Code of Ethics, Public Relations Society of America, available at [http://www.prsa.org/aboutUs/ethics/preamble\\_en.html](http://www.prsa.org/aboutUs/ethics/preamble_en.html) .

**Case 3-G, Quit, Blow the Whistle, or Go with the Flow, pp. 85-87.**

**Monday, Dec. 12: Advertising.**

American Advertising Federation Statement of Principles,  
<http://www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=37> .

**Case 3-F, In the Eye of the Beholder, pp. 82-84.**

**Ethical dimensions of entertainment media.**

*Patterson*, chapter 10, "Ethical Dimensions of Art and Entertainment," pp. 273-286.

**Case 10-E, Hate Radio, pp. 297-299.**

**Monday, Dec. 19: Final Exam (Tentative)**

**DEPARTMENT POLICIES**

**EMAIL:**

You must have your UM email account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the University.

**CELLPHONES:**

You must turn them off during class.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements, which are acceptable to your professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence due to illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another class. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

Reasonable and appropriate accommodations will be provided to students with disabilities who present a memo from Student Disability Services (SDS).

**CHEATING:**

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

"Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written



work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all." (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

#### **ONLINE SETEs:**

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that class. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.

#### **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be to

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Council seeks to promote student learning and encourages experimentation and innovation.

Assessment is a system of evaluation of student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to grading at the individual level). Three criteria should guide assessment of student learning:

- Awareness: familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects.
- Understanding: assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas.
- Application: competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.