

# Case Study Project

## Assignment at a Glance

- Choose a real-world journalism ethics case that has occurred within the past 5 years
  - Interview as many of those involved as possible, including journalists AND those affected by the journalists' decisions in the case
  - Analyze the journalists' ethical decision-making in the cases, applying either a duty-based or a consequence-based model
  - Your final report will:
    - ✓ Describe the ethical dilemma(s) the journalists faced in your case
    - ✓ Identify multiple alternative responses they could have chosen (including what they actually did)
    - ✓ Evaluate the journalists' ethical decision-making and actions in the case, basing your evaluation in journalistic duty and/or an analysis of the consequences
    - ✓ Offer your recommendations about how the publication or broadcast outlet could improve their ethical decision-making in future similar cases.
- ✓ Due Date – Nov. 23

## ALL THE GORY DETAILS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Grading for the project will be based on satisfactory completion of the stated requirements, quality of research and analysis, and the quality of your writing.

The case must be related to an ethical dilemma, mistake, controversy or decision made by a journalist or journalism outlet within the past 5 years. This is to increase the chances that you will be able to interview those involved in the decision – **the most important part of your research** – and that they will remember reasonably well the sequence of events, how they made their decisions and what the consequences were. The case need not have happened in Florida, but you **must be able to interview the journalists involved in the decision or case**. You also **must interview** at least some of the individuals affected by or involved in the decision. These interviews can take place in person, via telephone or on email. **YOU CANNOT BASE YOUR PAPER PRIMARILY ON LIBRARY RESEARCH. YOU MUST TALK TO ACTUAL HUMAN BEINGS!**

### **The case study paper will include:**

**Case description:** A six- to eight-page case description, accompanied by any appropriate exhibits (i.e. copies of photographs or articles involved in the controversy). The description should be modeled after examples provided on the e-learning site or available in my office. The primary purpose of this description is to provide a narrative of what happened – the background, the journalist's or journalists' decision(s), and the immediate or short-term outcome or consequences of the decision(s). You will need to discuss the outcome/consequences of the decision(s) from the perspective of the journalists AND from the perspective of those affected by the decision. The case must be REAL and must be developed from research on articles, videos, photographs and interviews with journalism professionals and others involved in the case.

**Case analysis:** A three- to five-page analysis of the case in which you clearly define the ethical dilemma the journalists faced, describe a variety of alternative responses they could have chosen for their actions in the case, and explain why you believe the course they took was or was not ethically superior to any of the alternatives. State clearly your position, your rationale and the steps you would take to implement your recommendations for dealing with the case. In other words, if the journalists were still at the decision point, what would you tell them to do and why?

**Epilogue:** A one-page epilogue describing the longer-term outcome or consequences of the decision(s) made in the case. In particular, if the case led the journalists involved to change policies or gain new insights into how they will handle similar situations in the future, include that in your discussion.

**Bibliography:** In addition to MLA- or American Psychological Association-style bibliography entries. **Include a bibliography entry in MLA or American Psychological Association style for each document, website or other text source you used in writing your paper. In addition, include an entry for each interview conducted,** including the time, place and method via which the interview was done (i.e. in person, telephone, email, etc.) In addition, include telephone numbers and email addresses for everyone you interviewed.

### **Steps in Preparing the Case Study Paper**

#### **Step 1: Case Study Prospectus (due 9/9)**

Turn in a 1- to 2-page description of the case you're going to use for your paper. It should include the names of at least the key journalists involved and the publication or broadcast outlet, and it should describe briefly the ethical issue the case concerns (i.e. reporter-source relationships, publication of private information, deception, etc.)

#### **Step 2: Preliminary Report -- Outline and Annotated Source List (due 10/28)**

The outline should roughly follow the description above – case description, ethical analysis, epilogue – but should provide additional details within each section. In the case description section, outline the sequence of events and the ethical issues involved in the case. In the ethical analysis section, explain whether you're going to evaluate the

journalists' actions in the context of journalistic duty or the outcomes of their actions. If you have come to preliminary conclusions about how the journalists involved should have handled the case, briefly state what those conclusions are.

The annotated source list should be in alphabetical order, just as it will be in the final paper. Each document entry (i.e. articles from *Columbia Journalism Review* or *American Journalism Review* or book chapters that relate to or discuss your case) should include the full citation, along with two or three sentences describing the document's contribution to your paper. If you find Internet materials relevant to your paper, include the full URL address for the entry. Each interview entry should include the name of the person, the date(s) he or she was interviewed or will be interviewed, the method by which you conducted or will conduct the interview (in person, telephone, email), his or her phone number and email address and two or three sentences describing the interviewee's relationship to the case.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** By the time you turn in the preliminary report, you should have conducted AT LEAST one or two interviews of key sources.

### **Step 3: Final Case Study Paper** (with final peer evaluation)

Follow the general outline described above. You can make alterations to your preliminary outline, but make certain you still include all the required components. Remember that the quality of your writing is an important component of your grade. I strongly encourage the group to give itself enough time to write a first draft, wait a day or two, and then re-read and revise/edit the paper. We'll all be happier with the final result (and the resulting grade). I do have examples of good case study project from previous semesters, if you want to take a look at those.

**DO NOT** allow any team member to do little or none of the preliminary work but then put the paper together at the end. THIS NEVER WORKS!!!! Instead, each member of the team should be involved as much as possible in all facets of the study – locating background material, interviewing individuals involved in or affected by the case, developing the ethical analysis of the journalists' decisions and actions and writing/editing the final paper. Make certain each team member interviews at least one person involved in the case.

# Case Study Paper Evaluation

## Research

1. Does the paper include enough information about the case? Does it provide the relevant information needed to make a judgment about the actions of the journalists involved? \_\_\_\_\_/30

2. Were the most important or most relevant points of view included? Did the group interview the right people or otherwise find ways of including the relevant viewpoints? \_\_\_\_\_/25

3. If the paper includes discussion of library materials (i.e. articles, text discussion), are they relevant to the case? Have they been incorporated well into the case discussion? \_\_\_\_\_/20

## Ethical Analysis

4. Was discussion of one or more ethical principles/decision-making models incorporated into the analysis? Did the discussion accurately reflect the key points of the principle/decision-making model? \_\_\_\_\_/50

5. Were the arguments logically sound? Did the reasoning reflect a consistent application of the principles or rules? Did the arguments reflect ethical reasoning? \_\_\_\_\_/65

6. Did the group come to a clear conclusion, and was that conclusion supported by ethical principle and logical reasoning? Or, if the group argued "both sides," were both arguments presented equally well? \_\_\_\_\_/25

## Writing Quality and Mechanics

7. Was the paper well organized? Was the writing clear and understandable? Were style, grammar and punctuation rules followed? Were words spelled correctly? \_\_\_\_\_/35

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_/250