

Media Ethics J8080 (Fall 2012)
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Goals of the course

This class will provide you with a theoretical framework that will enable you to both spot and analyze ethical issues--in the broadest sense--as they arise in the mass media. Specifically, the class aims to accomplish at least one of the following: to awaken students to ethical issues; to acquaint students with the scholarly literature on professional ethics; to allow students to question the profession's conventional wisdom; to teach students how to change journalism and mass communication; to encourage students to know themselves better; and to encourage in students and the professor a sense of humility and respect for both the subtle and complex nature of ethical decisions.

Scope of the course

Through class discussion, short essays, role playing, writing a political ad watch for publication and the development of a term paper, students will be encouraged to explore ethical issues in some depth. Because the class is a seminar, much of its quality will depend on the effort put into class preparation not just by the professor but also by students.

Ethical questions in a variety of contexts will be considered--for example, is it ever ethically acceptable to lie to a source, your boss, your client, your employee or your reader/viewers? Do advertising practitioners function under the same--or a different--set of standards? How has thinking about privacy changed over the years? What is and should be the influence of competition and the profit motive on news? Do web journalists have different responsibilities than do legacy journalists? Is there truth in entertainment, specifically documentary film--and just how responsible is the artist for the truth that is conveyed?

In all these efforts, we will attempt to link specific decisions with larger goals--the role of the media in political society, journalism's relationship to liberty and social justice, public relations' practitioners efforts to balance advocacy and responsibility, how professionals can do well by doing better. Students will be expected to take part in class through discussion, sometimes as themselves and sometimes as "others", but always with the goal of developing a framework to

take from the classroom and amplify and change in the working world or the academy. The general trend of the course will be to move from individual ethical choice to a view of how the media ought to behave within a larger social and political framework.

Texts

There are three required texts for the class: There is additional required reading also on reserve in the university's electronic reserve system. You can tell something is one reserve by the double asterisk (**) in the syllabus. The technology has several virtues: it is legal, it saves you copying costs, and it can be accessed via your computer at home or work 24 hours a day. To access these readings, you do the following. Get on the internet and keyboard this address:

<http://eres.missouri.edu>

Once you have arrived there, you should go to the course name--shortened to "Media Ethics", or my last name, "Wilkins", to locate the readings. More than one person/computer can access the reading simultaneously. The password for this file is "Lee".

The acronym "eres" stands for electronic reserve. The most frequent mistake students make when they first access the system is to type "www" after the two backslashes. Don't do that, even though many other addresses use those letters. Once you get to the site, you might want to bookmark it for ease of use later.

If you do not have computer access, please let me know. I can and will make "dead tree" copies for you.

You should complete the reading by the date listed on the syllabus.

The texts are:

Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning (most recent edition). Christians, Rotzoll. Fackler, Richardson, Woods et al., New York: Longman.

Lying, Moral Choice in Public and Private Life, Bok, S. 1978. (a more recent edition may be available). New York: Random House.

The Moral Judgment of the Child . Piaget, J. 1972. New York: The Free Press.

In addition, if you discover ethical issues in the media during the course of the semester, don't hesitate to bring in the clipping, the video or audiotape, or...the offending or offended parties.

Grades:

The instructor would like to retain some flexibility in grading. However, this is the approximate breakdown of the final grade in the course:

Class participation	10%
Discussion leader assignment	10%
Essays and role playing assignments	30%
Ad watch	10%
Term paper	40%

Grades will be awarded on a +/- basis.

A word about writing

Ethics, more than most subjects, demands clear, thoughtful communication. For many of you, the course will seem to contain 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 and coherent argument that is specifically connected to class reading and discussion. Doing ethics relies heavily on critical thinking, and your written work will be judged on improvement in your ability to think critically and your expression of those thoughts. Academic standards regarding intellectual integrity, originality of thought, and appropriate citation of sources will be meticulously applied.

Your role as discussion leader

Beginning the second week of the course, one or two of you will have responsibility for leading a class discussion about one of the readings (or a portion of the reading) that is assigned for that week. You can provoke class discussion in many ways—through a case study, by bringing in additional reading, by asking students in the class to role play, or through watching and commenting on a variety of media content. What you may NOT do is lecture; the assumption is that your colleagues will have read the material before you begin your work. You should plan to do this work at the beginning of the class for about 15 minutes. Although two people may be “assigned” each week, you may choose to work as a team or as autonomous individuals. It’s up to you.

Your ad watch

We are fortunate (?) to have this class during the fall semester of a Presidential election year. That means there will be lots of political ads—for races from state legislature to national office—on the air (radion/ television), on-line, in print, and through direct mail. We’ll all be able to look at a lot of them. You will be asked to write an “ad watch” that examines the claims in a political ad of your chosing.

Those ad watches are published on the KBIA and KOMU websites. You'll be asked to select the ad you are "watching" (it does not have to be a broadcast ad) by late in September and to complete your ad watch by late October. This will require a significant amount of independent research on your part. Additional information and instructions will be forthcoming during the early part of the semester.

Your term paper

You will select the topic of your term paper after discussion with me. Your paper may focus on a specific issues--should news reporters name crime suspects in their reports before formal charges are filed--or on more academic issues--moral development as it applies to the professions. Regardless of subject matter, your term paper needs to contain the following: 1. a brief history of the issue itself (for example, did journalists begin to think about this in 1900 or is it something that's new with the internet); 2. review of significant historical ethics cases that focus on this issue; 3. An in-depth and critical review of the pertinent scholarly literature about the issue (this element should comprise the bulk of your paper); 4. your own conclusions based on what have read and learned. While the emphasis in this paper is on scholarly research, I also encourage you to interview real journalists, strategic communication professional, etc., who are making real decisions about these questions. The internet is a good way to make contact--but the phone can work for you, too. What I am most concerned about is that this paper becomes a way for you to build your own bridge between the classroom and the profession--which is the larger intellectual goal of any class in professional ethics.

Expectations

Because this is a graduate seminar, you will be expected to perform both in and out of class at a level that merits graduate credit. Minimally this means late papers or papers with significant problems in writing, grammar, spelling, etc., will not be accepted. No incompletes will be given. More important, the quality of our in-class time depends on your willingness to come prepared to engage in active discussions with your colleagues. For many of you, this willingness to come to class prepared will reflect the unique aspects of a Missouri education. The instructor does not regard newsroom commitments as *a priori* to academic work. You are expected to spend extra time and effort on out-of-class essay assignments. Grades will reflect whether such extra effort is evident.

Since this is an ethics class, you are expected to follow the highest standards of academic integrity. Please note the following:

Academic misconduct includes some of the following: extensive use of materials from another author without citation/attribution, extensive use of verbatim materials from another author with citation/attribution, extensive use of materials from past assignments, extensive use of materials from assignments in other, current classes.

Classroom misconduct includes forgery, obstruction or disruption of teaching, physical abuse or safety threats, theft, property damage, disruptive, lewd or obscene conduct, abuse of computer time, repeated failure to attend class when attendance is required and repeated failure to participate or respond in class when class participation is required.

Under MU policy, your instructor has the right to ask for your removal from the course for misconduct or excessive absences. The instructor then has the right to issue a grade of withdraw, withdraw failing or F. The instructor alone is responsible for assigning the grade in such circumstances.

The University's M Book Rules and Regulations regarding student classroom conduct and deportment, academic misconduct including plagiarism and falsification will be followed. Classroom misconduct will be reported immediately to the Graduate School or the office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Academic misconduct allegations will be reported immediately to the Provost's office.

It is possible that some of these guidelines may be waived under special circumstances, so, *if you wish to avoid problems, please ask in advance.*

Regarding honesty: The School of Journalism is committed to the highest standards of academic and professional ethics and expects its students to adhere to those standards. Students are expected to observe strict honesty in academic programs and as representatives of school-related media. Should any student be guilty of plagiarism, falsification, misrepresentation or other forms of dishonesty in any assigned work, they may be subject to a failing grade from the course teacher and such disciplinary action as may be recommended pursuant to University regulations. While there are campus-wide penalties for such infractions, the penalty in this class is unwaivering: if you cheat, you flunk, the assignment and the course. During the semester, various plagiarism detections programs available through the school and the campus will be applied to your written work.

ADA: If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and need assistance, please notify me immediately. A reasonable effort will be met to accommodate your needs.

Religious Holidays: Students are excused for religious holidays. Please let me know in advance if you have a conflict.

Course schedule

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading / Assignments</u>
August 20th	Introduction to Doing Ethics	Christians, pp. 1-30; Film: The Insider
August 27th	Moral Reasoning	<i>Handbook of Mass Media Ethics</i> , chpts. 3 and 5** (Elliott; Christians) Bok, Chpt. 1-7;
September 3	It's a holiday—enjoy	
September 10	Truth-telling and objectivity Truth essay due	Complete Bok; Christians, Chpt. 2-3
	DISCUSSION LEADER DISCUSSION LEADER	
September 17	Privacy	Hodges, Chapter XX, <i>Handbook Mass Media Ethics</i> ; Christians, chpt. 5; Alderman & Kennedy, pp. 151-222.**
	DISCUSSION LEADER DISCUSSION LEADER	
	Role play today	
September 24	No formal class: devote time to reading about persuasion ethics and to selecting the ad for your ad watch, also thinking about your term paper	
	Due by <u>noon</u>, September 26, brief description of the "ad" you have selected and link to that ad or a visual image of the ad. Sent via e-mail to me.	
October 1	Persuasion ethics	Christians, chpt.. 6-9; Patterson and Wilkins, Chpt. 3, 5**
	DISCUSSION LEADER DISCUSSION LEADER	

Page 7

October 8 Is seeing believing Patterson and Wilkins,
*Media Ethics: Issues
and Cases*, Chpt. 9;**

DISCUSSION LEADER
DISCUSSION LEADER

October 15 Ethics and the bottom line Christians, chpt.1, 15;
Good News, chp. 5;**
AJR pp. 20-35;**

DISCUSSION LEADER
DISCUSSION LEADER

Term paper prospectus due by noon, Friday October 19th

October 22 Social justice: Hate Christians, chpt. 16-
17; Matsuda, Public
Response to racist
speech

DISCUSSION LEADER
DISCUSSION LEADER

Hate speech essay due

October 29 Media accountability Wyatt, chpt. 6-7;**
Murdoch's Mess and Wikileaks *Handbook of Mass
Media Ethics*, chpt. 15
Williams **

Ad watch due by 9 a.m. today

November 5 Social Justice Film: The Killing
Fields; *Handbook Mass
Media Ethics*, chpts. 15 and
22 (Craig and Fackler)

Page 8

November 12	This is your brain on ethics DISCUSSION LEADER DISCUSSION LEADER	Wilkins in Ward**
November 19 th	Eat turkey ethically	Work on term Paper; read Piaget
November 26 th	The moral self	Film: <i>Gandhi</i> Piaget, entire;
December 3	A journalist's ethic of care DISCUSSION LEADER DISCUSSION LEADER	King, Letter from Birmingham** <i>Handbook Mass Media Ethics</i> , chpt. 4 (Coleman & Wilkins)
December 10 th	TERM PAPER DUE BY 11 A.M. Ethical lunch: Lee treats	