

Problems and Ethics in Journalism  
JOU 4700  
Summer A 2008

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Office Hours: W & R – 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
& by appointment

Class Location: FLG 0220

Class Time: M, W, R, F – 9:30-10:45 a.m.

**Objectives and Course Description:** This course is designed to familiarize you with common ethical issues and dilemmas facing working journalists today. We will also discuss how professional practices and economic interests of the media industry pose challenges to ethical decision-making. You will learn about the models and underlying philosophies of ethical decision-making, which provide a systematic process for reasoning through difficult decisions.

This course is not intended to give you a list of hard and fast rules for ethical behavior, but rather to give you tools and practice in applying principles to address ethical dilemmas. Think of it as an ethics skills course.

**Required Texts**

- *Media Ethics: Issues and Cases* (6th Edition), by Phillip Patterson and Lee Wilkins.
- Ethical issues on the Romenesko Web site: <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=45>
- Other readings as assigned

**Academic Honesty:** You are responsible to abide by the University of Florida's policy of Academic Honesty. You are expected to do your own work and properly cite the research or ideas of others. Cheating or plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. Misrepresentation or fabrication of any information will likewise not be tolerated. If you fail to abide by these policies, you will automatically receive a zero on the assignment. In addition, I will follow the Judicial Process for Honor Code Violations to handle the situation according to university policy. If you have any questions about whether or not something is a violation of academic honesty, **ask me!** You can also find more information about the university's academic honesty policy at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php>.

**Accommodation for Students With Disabilities:** Students needing classroom accommodation for a disability must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation to the student, who will then bring a copy of this documentation to me. If you do have a disability that requires accommodation, please do not hesitate to request it, even if you don't believe you'll need it during the course of the class. You can contact the Dean of Students Office by calling (352) 392-1261, or going to their Web site at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu>.

**Classroom Policies:**

- Turn off your cell phone and put it away
- No food. You may bring a drink if it has a lid, but please no spills and make sure you throw your garbage away at the end of class.
- Laptops are not allowed to be used during lecture or class discussions. Please keep your laptop turned off and put away.
- You will be expected to participate in discussions. All students are expected to maintain a respectful attitude toward their fellow classmates and to me. Insults, rudeness and any other behavior unfit for the classroom will not be tolerated.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two unexcused absences throughout the semester without penalty. Absences such as weddings, vacations, conflicts with other classes, etc. are considered unexcused. You must arrange with me to make up any missed assignments ahead of time. You must provide documentation for any additional, unforeseeable absences (i.e. illness, death in the family, etc.). Any unexcused absence after two absences will result in your final class grade reduced by one letter grade. I will be taking attendance each class period.

**Tardiness:** Please be courteous to your fellow students and me – arrive for class on time. If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be considered tardy. I'll let you slide once. After that, any tardy will result in your final class grade reduced by 2 percent. I will also probably call attention to your lack of timeliness in class when you come in.

**Tests:** There will be two tests during the semester, each one covering roughly half of the course. The tests will most likely consist of two or three essay questions, which will be scored based on how well you understand issues and your ability to apply ethical decision-making models/philosophies in reasoning through those issues. Except in extremely rare and unforeseeable circumstances (i.e. death in the family, tragic accidents, etc.), I will not allow a student to make up an exam. In such cases, you must provide documentation.

**Ethics Journals:** You will turn in an ethics journal twice during the semester. The purpose of these journals is to give you practice in applying the ethical philosophies and decision-making models to real world issues. Each journal will consist of **four (4)** entries. Two entries may be about anything personally relevant to you in your life, but **at least two entries must address some ethical dilemma related to journalism.**

The journals are not hypothetical discussions. You will need to find real cases, either from your own life or in the profession of journalism, and work through them systematically. Your grade will be based on your effort and ability to carefully, seriously think through these issues. Moralizing about issues (i.e. dogmatic assertions of opinion) will result in low grades, while moral reasoning (i.e. examining the multiple morally relevant factors of a case and systematically applying ethical philosophies/models to reach a decision) will result in high grades.

**Decision Memos:** You will turn in decision memos twice during the semester. These memos are intended to give you a chance to place yourself in the shoes of a working journalist facing an ethical dilemma. You will be asked to recommend a course of action to your boss regarding a specific dilemma, and defend your decision using ethical principles. These memos will be the **only time** you are not expected to identify ethical philosophies/models specifically. What I'll be looking for is that you can take the concepts and apply them without the philosophical lingo.

**Grading:** Grades will be determined as follows –

Tests	250 points X 2 Tests	=	500 points
Ethics Journals	125 points X 2 Journals	=	250 points
Decision Memos	75 points X 2 Memos	=	150 points
Class Participation		=	100 points

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**Total points possible**

**1,000 points**

Final grades will be assigned on the standard break-points: 90%-plus = A, 87%-89% = B+, 80%-86% = B, 77%-79% = C+, 70%-76% = C, 67%-69% = D+, 60%-66% = D, less than 60% = E. It is unlikely that the grades will be curved.

### **Schedule of Topics and Assignments**

**Part 1:** Introduction to ethical philosophies, moral development, and ethical decision-making models

**Part 2:** Newsgathering techniques

**Part 3:** Conflicts of interest

**Part 4:** Coverage of sensitive issues

**Part 5:** Special issues in photojournalism

**Part 6:** Minorities, women, and stereotypes in the media

**Part 7:** Online journalism ethics

**Deadlines:** All assignments must be turned in by the beginning of class on the day they are due. If you find you are having trouble with an assignment, come to me **ahead of time**. In some cases, with my permission in advance, you may be allowed to turn in an assignment up to 24 hours late for a reduction of one letter grade on the assignment. In all other cases, any deadline not met will result in a zero for the assignment.

**May 23:** Journal 1

**May 30:** Test 1

**June 4:** Decision Memo 1

**June 12:** Journal 2

**June 16:** Decision Memo 2

**June 20:** Test 2