

MASS COMMUNICATION ETHICS

C&J 465 Syllabus



The University of New Mexico

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Autumn 2008
Tuesdays and Thursdays
3:30 to 4:45 p.m., CJ 119

*Office hours are 9 to 11:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in CJ 223 or by appointment.
Drop-ins are welcome any time.*

Making Ethical Decisions and Building Analytical Skills

COURSE OVERVIEW: This course will study the power (and occasional arrogance) of the press, and the ethical problems that often arise. We will focus special attention on the news media in the print, broadcast and Internet industries, and we also will consider ethical issues in advertising, public relations and management.

This course is designed for communication and journalism students who plan careers in the media. The University of New Mexico is one of a relatively small number of universities offering a full-semester course dealing exclusively with media ethics. The Journal of Media Ethics, however, notes that the numbers of such part-semester and full-semester courses are increasing each year as educators and professionals come to recognize that competitive pressures combined with technological ability have made ethical decision-making and analysis more problematic for today's media companies.

Owners, managers and staffers of modern media companies all have a crucial stake in furthering ethical principles and fairness to re-establish faith with the public. Studies show consumers are losing confidence in the ability of the media to inform them objectively, accurately and responsibly. This course will explore how media professionals can better serve the public through ethical decision-making that leads to trustworthy performance.

TEXT: "Ethics in Journalism," by Ron F. Smith, 6th Edition, 2008.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this course, as the title suggests, is to give students the opportunity to develop skills in analyzing ethical dilemmas in journalism and making ethical decisions. The class will depend primarily on group discussions. In taking this class, the students should:

- Learn to be careful consumers of media messages, aware that they may be tainted by the errors of people within the media and without.
- Learn ethical ways of thinking, including well-established ethical theories, to better understand what constitutes ethical conduct.
- Understand contemporary issues of mass communication, including media-government dynamics, invasion of privacy, propaganda, and the ethics of marketing persuasion.

- Appreciate some of the difficulties of media decision-making, including: Conflicts among responsibilities to the public, the client or the information source, and your media employer; problems of information suppression; and the balance between society's right to know and its need to know.

- Gain an appreciation of the First Amendment's implied responsibility for journalism.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Everyone in class will need to have access to the Internet to receive readings on the class web site. The textbook "Ethics in Journalism" is required for each student. Likewise, each student must complete assignments by the respective due dates, and all are expected to participate in class discussions. No extra credit work is provided for this class.

Miscellany....

CLASS WEB SITE: A web site is maintained for this class at the following URL: unm.edu/~herrick/cj465

The site contains class announcements, e-mail addresses for the class, test results, URLs for other relevant journalism web sites, and class information.

ATTENDANCE: You can notify the instructor by e-mail, telephone or in person if an illness or emergency necessitates your absence from class. **Even if you have an excused absence, it is your responsibility—not the instructor’s—to find out what you missed in any class and complete any missed assignments before the next class meeting.** Exceptional contributions in class discussions may be rewarded, and lack of participation or attendance may be penalized

Unless the instructor is notified ahead of time, you will not be allowed to make up any quiz or assignment missed due to absence or tardiness.

PLAGIARISM: Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language defines plagiarize as “to take ideas, writings, etc. from another and pass them off as one’s own.” It can get you fired from a future job—and can get you a failing grade on an assignment, or the entire course here. In writing papers, you may use research reference materials from libraries, the Internet and from contemporary media sources. However, all words, thoughts and concepts that are not your own must be properly attributed to the sources from which you obtained the information.

ASSISTANCE: Qualified students with disabilities needing appropriate academic adjustments should contact me as soon as possible to ensure your needs are met in a timely manner. Handouts are available in other formats upon request.

DIVERSITY: This course encourages different perspectives related to such factors as gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other relevant cultural identities. This course seeks to foster understanding and inclusiveness related to such diverse perspectives and ways of communicating.

ETHICS: The course emphasizes ethical practices and perspectives. Above all, students and instructors should strive to communicate and act, both in class interactions and in assigned coursework, in a manner directed by personal integrity, honesty, and respect for self and others. Included in this focus is the need for academic honesty by students as stated by the “UNM Pathfinder.” Students need to do original work and properly cite sources. For

example, be aware of plagiarism. Directly copying more than three or four words from another author without quoting (not just citing) the author is plagiarism. Further, course content will encourage the ethical practices and analysis of print journalism. COMPLAINTS: Procedures for students with a complaint about any member of the teaching staff are described in the UNM Pathfinder. Students are encouraged to try to resolve the matter with the instructor first. If the complaint is not resolved to the student’s satisfaction, the student then has recourse to other alternatives. Any questions about the procedures should be directed to the Office of the Dean of Students.

ADDITIONAL READINGS: Some additional readings will be required of students as hand-outs, or as publications accessible over the Internet. These will be assigned in class.

ALERT: Brief written assignments and unannounced short quizzes will be given to prove your understanding of the readings.

LATE PAPERS: As stated on Page 1, papers are due on the assigned dates. Late assignments will be marked down. Non-submitted papers will receive a zero instead of an F.

GRADING: The grades you earn on your papers and the midterm and final exams will be combined to determine your semester grade. The approximate weights of the course requirements will be:

Assignments, quizzes, projects	30%
Mid-term exam	20%
Final paper	20%
Final exam	30%

Excessive absences will result in a student being dropped from the class.

MORE THAN YOU EVER NEEDED OR WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dennis Herrick is a full-time lecturer in journalism at the University of New Mexico. He also taught journalism for two years at the University of Iowa.

He was owner and publisher of a group of weekly newspapers and a shopper in Iowa for 12 years before selling the company in 1997. He was a reporter for more than 11 years with daily newspapers in Michigan, and was chief of staff for a member of Congress in 1977-85. He was a member of the Iowa Newspaper Association Board of Directors for nine years.

The instructor acknowledges the contributions of syllabi from other courses on media ethics. The goals for the course were borrowed from the ethics syllabus of Dr. Bob Gassaway, retired from the University of New Mexico.

Projected Class Schedule for the Semester

SCHEDULE CHANGES ANNOUNCED IN CLASS

Week 1: Aug. 26-28 Course overview; Basis of ethical studies; First Amendment; history and roles of media	Week 10: Oct. 28-30 Deception Read chapter 10 Video: "Why America Hates the Press," part I
Week 2: Sept. 2-4 Search for principles; Ethics codes Read chapter 1 Ring of Gyges paper due Sept. 2	Week 11: Nov. 4-6 Privacy Read chapters 11 and 12 Video: "Doing Ethics in Journalism" Term paper ideas due Nov. 4
Week 3: Sept. 9-11 The study of ethics Read chapter 2 Ethics Code paper due Sept. 9	Week 12: Nov. 11-13 Compassion and photographers Read chapter 13 Internet photos presentation
Week 4: Sept. 16-18 Truth and objectivity Read chapter 3 Moral reasoning/Heinz' Dilemma Hutchins Commission Personal ethics paper due Sept. 16	Week 13: Nov. 18-20 Journalists and their communities; Freebies and financial concerns Read chapters 14 and 15 Video: "Why America Hates the Press," part II
Week 5: Sept. 23-25 Errors; Transparency Read chapters 4 and 5 Video: "Absence of Malice"	Week 14: Nov. 25 (No class on Thursday, Nov. 27) Advertising "I Don't Want to Be Perfect" Term papers due Nov. 25
Week 6: Sept. 30-Oct. 2 Faking the news Read chapter 6 Manipulated photos presentation	Week 15: Dec. 2-4 Advertising (cont) & Business of Journalism "Video excerpts from "Killing Us Softly" Read Chapter 16 PowerPoint on media giants
Week 7: Oct. 7-9 Working with sources; Unnamed sources Read chapters 7 and 9 Video excerpts from "Shattered Glass"	Week 16: Dec. 9-13 Review
Week 8: Oct. 14 (No class on Thursday, Oct. 16) MID-TERM EXAM	Final Exam: 5:30 to 7:30 on Monday, Dec. 15
Week 9: Oct. 21-23 Propaganda/Four theories of the press The government watch Read Chapter 8 Video: "When good journalists do bad things"	Grading for all work turned in as follows: 100 = A+; 94-99 = A; 90-93 = A- 87-89 = B+; 84-86 = B; 80-83 = B- 77-79 = C+; 74-76 = C; 70-73 = C- 67-69 = D+; 64-66 = D; 60-63 = D- Below 60 = F Assignment not turned in = Zero

CLASS FORMAT — Classes will be conducted in a lecture-discussion format, with emphasis on participation by students. We will work together to explore issues raised in the course, and attempt to reach some conclusions about ethical decision-making. Absolutes are not always attainable in the professional world, however, and certainly not in the realm of ethics where different people are guided by different principles.

FORMAT OF PAPERS — All assignments will have a 1-inch margin at the top, bottom and on both sides of 8 1/2 x 11 paper, double-spaced and typed in 12 point Times or Times New Roman fonts. The term paper must be at least eight full pages (not counting references). It must have a minimum of five references, with at least two references from books while the others can be from magazines, newspapers and the Internet. Your work will be graded not only on the basis of content but also on the writing mechanics of grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence construction and clarity.

C&J 465

3 credit hours

MASS COMMUNICATION ETHICS

DESCRIPTION

This class is designed for students who are Journalism majors (print and broadcast) and Mass Communication majors (advertising, public relations and media studies) who plan careers in the mass media. The course will study the power (and occasional arrogance) of the press, and the ethical problems that often arise. Special attention is focused on the news media in the print, broadcast and Internet industries, as well as ethical issues arising in advertising, public relations and management.

MISSION

Develop skills in students in analyzing ethical dilemmas for media employees and in making ethical decisions.

OBJECTIVES

- Gain an appreciation and understanding of the *First Amendment* and its implied directive for responsible journalism.
- Develop an appreciation for the relationship of *truth, accuracy and fairness* as well as *diversity of audiences* through discussion of media practice of ethics.
- Examine ethical principles, including well-established ethical *theories*, to better understand what constitutes *ethical ways of thinking and acting*.
- Exercise *creative and analytical thinking* in examining and evaluating ethical dilemmas and questions in the conduct of mass media employees.
- Build awareness of the *history and role of the media* by understanding contemporary issues of media-government dynamics, invasion of privacy, propaganda, social responsibility, and the ethics of marketing persuasion.
- Write a paper demonstrating *research and critical evaluation* skills on an ethical issue.