

1-2014

## JRNL 400.01: Ethics and Trends in News Media

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# JRNL 400/ETHICS AND TRENDS

Spring 2013



"IN AN EXCLUSIVE, SOURCES TELL US THAT A SUSPECT HAS BEEN ARRESTED AND ALSO THAT NO SUSPECTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND ALSO THAT POLICE HAVE NO SUSPECTS, AND IN FACT, NONE OF THIS MAY BE TRUE...BUT YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST!"

**Instructor:** Dennis Swibold, 243-2230, [dennis.swibold@umontana.edu](mailto:dennis.swibold@umontana.edu)

**Class meetings:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:40-11 a.m., DAH 316

**Office hours:** 11 a.m. to noon, T-Th, or by appointment

## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

This course aims to help students function ethically and successfully as journalists. By the course's end, successful students should have a more nuanced understanding of the ethical issues facing the evolving news media and be able to develop a framework for making ethical decisions. They should also have a deeper awareness of the economic and cultural environments in which today's journalists operate.

## HOW WE'LL WORK

We will follow current and past ethical debates and study particular cases that reveal how journalists have wrestled with those questions. Students are expected to present cases, research and write about ethical and professional trends, and participate vigorously in class discussions. I expect you to stake out positions and

test each other's assertions. The class will also feature a sprinkling of guests, and will give us an opportunity to do some final academic advising for seniors.

## REQUIREMENTS

**1. Attendance and participation** – Seminars can't succeed without your involvement. You are expected to attend every class and participate in every discussion. I'll be tracking that.

You are allowed one unexcused absence, but not on your presentation day. Doing work for other classes is not a worthy excuse. If you are sick, notify me by voicemail or email before class begins. Two unexcused absences means a deduction of one letter grade. Be on time. If you are late consistently, your grade will suffer. Check your official UM email regularly for reading assignments and other communications.

**2. Reading:** Read [www.jimromenesko.com](http://www.jimromenesko.com) every day. It's a great place for news about trends and ethical dilemmas in the profession. Much of the class discussion will center on current ethical lapses, and here's where you'll find the latest. Expect the occasional quiz on those issues. By the way, the Poynter Institute's site ([pointer.org](http://pointer.org)) is a great first stop for researching ethics cases, too.

**3. Ethics presentation:** Each of you will be assigned an ethical problem to research and present to the class. You will research the topic, make a 20- to 30-minute class presentation and lead the class discussion that follows. I'll post a schedule of presentation dates soon.

The presentation will include a three-page paper outlining the incident, the response and your opinion on how the problem should have been addressed. The paper must also include discussion questions you intend to pose and sources you have consulted. The paper is due to me by email two days before your presentation.

**4. Research paper:** You must have an approved topic for your research paper no later than **Feb. 13**. It can be about professional trends or ethics cases we haven't discussed in class presentations. Start pitching me ideas via Moodle.

Pick a topic that involves a trend in news media, one that is complex enough to merit a paper of at least 3,000 words. *The paper must include your assessment of the situation.* It also must include a list sources consulted, either in footnotes or a



bibliography at the end. It should contain some original research (primary sources), not just a rehash of what others have written or said. That means you'll have to interview sources with have first-hand knowledge of the subject (probably not your friends or professors.)

This paper is a work of journalism. It must reflect the level of research, thinking and writing expected of a senior. If you criticize people, you must seek comments from those critiqued, be they local or national figures. In other words, it must show that you understand the topic thoroughly.

*The deadlines:*

*I'll expect a first draft of the research paper in my office and by email by **5 p.m., Tuesday, April 15.***

*A hard copy and an email version of the final draft are due in class on **Tuesday, May 6.** The final draft will include entire paper, along with footnotes and endnotes citing your sources.*

## **GRADING**

I'll grade you on participation, quizzes, your ethics presentation and your research paper. For the *participation grade*, I'll take attendance and monitor your contribution to class discussions. The in-class *quizzes* will be in multiple choice or short-answer form and will reflect how well you follow Romenesko's blog. My grades for the presentation and research paper will be based on the quality of your research and presentation. More about that later.

Here's how I'll calculate a final grade:

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| • Class participation                        | 10 percent |
| • Quizzes                                    | 10 percent |
| • Ethics presentation, including short paper | 30 percent |
| • Research paper                             | 50 percent |

## **PLAGIARISM AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES**

If you plagiarize, you will get an F for the course, which means you'll have to retake JRNL 400 to graduate. I promise you I will be scrutinizing your work, so attribute any instance in which you use someone else's words or ideas. It's so easy to avoid with attribution, links or footnotes. Also, Wikipedia is not an acceptable source for research (but it could be a great place to start.)

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from

me. To do so without permission will result in an “F” for the assignment and could result in an “F” for the course.

### **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities can request reasonable program modifications by consulting with the instructor. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the Disability Services Web site at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/)