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JRNL 400.01: Ethics and Trends in News Media

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JRNL 400/ETHICS & TRENDS

Spring 2015

Instructor: Dennis Swibold, 243-2230,

dennis.swibold@umontana.edu

Class meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays
2:10 to 3:30 p.m., DAH 210

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 accomplish those

We will follow current and past ethical debates and study particular cases that reveal how journalists have wrestled with those questions. Students are expected 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, so you're expected to attend every class and participate in every discussion. It's a serious chunk of your grade, and I'll be tracking that.

You are allowed one unexcused absence, but never on your presentation day. Doing work for other classes is not an excuse. Otherwise, if you are sick or in jail, 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 participation grade will suffer. Check your official UM email regularly for reading assignments and other communications.

2. Reading: Read Poynter.org's MediaWire blog 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) 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 30-minute class presentation and lead the class discussion that follows. I'll post a schedule of presentation dates soon.

At least two days before your presentation send me a written description of the issues you intend to raise. Tell me which sources you intend to use, and also include major questions you intend to pose to the class. The description 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 2,500 words. *The paper must include your research into the problem and your assessment of the situation.* It also must include a list sources consulted, either in footnotes or endnotes. It must contain original and timely research (primary sources), not just a rehash of what others have written or said. That means you'll have to interview sources with first-hand knowledge of the subject.

Warning: You cannot use J-school profs and other students as sources.

This paper is a work of critical inquiry and thinking. It must reflect the level of research and writing expected of a senior. And you must be fair. If you criticize people or institutions, you must seek responses.

Key deadlines:

1. I'll expect a first draft of the research paper in my office and by email by noon.
Friday, March 27

2. A hard copy and an email version of the final draft are due in class on Wednesday, 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 the Poynter 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 (attendance, discussion, quizzes), 20 percent
- Ethics presentation, including short paper, 30 percent
- Research paper (average of both drafts), 50 percent

Plagiarism and other problems

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 that I will be scrutinizing your work, so attribute any instance in which you use someone else's words or ideas. Avoid the temptation by using attribution, links or footnotes. Also, Wikipedia is not an acceptable source for attribution, but it could be a great place to find sources.

You may not submit any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class. Doing so will result in an "F" for the assignment and perhaps 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](#) site.