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JRNL 400.01: Ethics and Trends in News Media

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JRNL 400/ETHICS & TRENDS

Spring 2016

Instructor: Dennis Swibold, 243-2230, dennis.swibold@umontana.edu

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:40-11., DAH 210

Office hours: 3:30-4:30, T-Th, or by appointment.

Objectives

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 changing demographic, economic and technological in which today's journalists operate.



Outcomes

We will follow current and past ethical debates and study particular cases that reveal how journalists have wrestled with those questions. Outcomes: 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 with great questions. The class will also feature several guests, and offer us an opportunity to do some final academic and career 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'll also be asked to participate in a senior knowledge exam for the school's assessment plan, as well as practice job

interviews with local media professionals. Get your resumes, portfolios, clips and reels ready to go asap.

You are allowed one unexcused absence, but never on your presentation day. Doing work for other classes or a job is not an excuse. Otherwise, if you are sick or in jail, notify me by phone, voicemail or email before class begins. Every unexcused absence means a deduction of 10 points from your participation grade. Be on time.

2. **Reading:** I'm not requiring a text for this course, but if I were, it would be "The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century," edited by Kelly McBride and Tom Rosenstiel. It argues for revamping some of the traditional tenants of journalism ethics and it includes wonderful essays on subjects on current ethical dilemmas involving sourcing, diversity, database journalism, networking, community and audience engagement.

Check in daily with <http://money.cnn.com/media/> Subscribe to the daily newsletter. Follow media reporter [@briantelter](#) on Twitter. Other good media sources to follow include [@davidfolkenflik](#), NPR's media reporter, and [@jimrutenberg](#), the media columnist at The New York Times. Poynter.org/news is a great for keeping up with trends and debates about coverage. You'll find ideas and sources for your research papers at Poynter and sites such as the Shorenstein Center's <http://journalistsresource.org/>

If I don't see that you're keeping up, you can expect the occasional quiz on those issues. Check your official UM email regularly for reading assignments and other communications.

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, you must 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. Do not expect to present without my prior approval.

4. **Research paper:** You must have an approved topic for your research paper no later Feb/ 12. 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 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 your research must include interviews sources who are experts in the subject.

Warning: Thou shall not 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 include their responses.

Key deadlines:

- I'll expect a first draft of your research question by class time Feb. 16. I need to see the essential question your paper will ask and a rundown of the human and documentary sources you intend to use to answer the question. Show me some pre-reporting.
- Your second draft will outline your introduction, question, research method and sources you've found to answer the question. It's due by class time on March 24.
- A hard copy and an email version of the final draft are due in class on Thursday, May 5. The final draft will be the entire paper: the introduction, question, method, the body of reporting and your conclusion, supported by footnotes and endnotes that cite your specific sources.

Grading

I'll grade you on participation, your ethics presentation and your research paper. For the participation grade, I'll take attendance and monitor your contribution to class discussions. 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, maybe quizzes), 25 percent. (I'll allow you one free absence, though you can't take it on the day your assignment to make your ethics presentation. Otherwise, each unexcused absence will cost you 10 points on your participation grade.
- Ethics presentation, 25 percent.
- Research paper (average of both drafts), 50 percent. The first draft will focus heavily on your research question and the sources you've found or contacted. The second draft will focus more broadly on the research, writing and conclusion. Stay tuned for more.

A class-by-class presentation schedule will follow within the week.

Plagiarism and other problems

If you plagiarize the paper or even portions of it, you will get an F for the assignment, which means you'll have to retake JRNL 400 to graduate. I promise you that I will be scrutinizing your work, so attribute every 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.