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JRNL 400.01: Ethics and Trends in News Media

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Spring 2017

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

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 10:50 a.m., DAH 210

Office hours: 3:30-4:30, 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, including the need for diversity and inclusion.
- Be able to develop a framework for making ethical decisions.
- Have a deeper awareness of the economic and cultural environments in which today’s journalists operate.

We accomplish those goals by following current and past ethical debates and studying particular cases that reveal how journalists are wrestling with such questions. Specifically, all students will:

- Research and present assigned cases regarding ethics and professional trends.
- Research and write an in-depth research paper about a current ethical topic or professional trend that they chose, with my approval.
- Participate vigorously in class discussions. I expect you to stake out positions and test each other’s assertions and conclusions. The class will
also feature a sprinkling of guests and offer us an opportunity to do some final academic advising for seniors.

- Contribute to the class forum on Moodle, where I'll expect you to write briefly on topics of the day.

**Requirements**

**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 two unexcused absences, 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 voicemail or email before class begins. Three unexcused absences mean a deduction of one letter grade, four will cost you another. You can’t afford more than that. Be on time. If you are late consistently, your participation grade will suffer. Check the course Moodle page your official UM email regularly for reading assignments and other communications.

You must take the mandatory Senior Survey, which will appear on Moodle. **The deadline is Friday, Feb. 3.** (You saw the exact survey as freshman. I won't grade it, we need it for our overall assessment purposes.

**Reading**

Subscribe to CNN media reporter and critic Brian Stelter’s daily "Reliable Sources" email and read it. Doing so will help you keep up with the topics and trends your professional peers are talking about. [Click here](#) to sign up.

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.

Other good sources for ethical talk and research on news media trends include [Journalist's Resource](#) at Harvard’s Shorenstein Center and the [Poynter Institute](#). Another great media research site is [Pew's Center's Media & News link](#).
**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 in a comprehensive discussion of the issue. I’ll post a schedule of presentation dates soon.

Send me by email a written overview of the issue you intend to present at last three days before the presentation. Tell me which sources you intend to use, and also include major questions you intend to pose to the class.

**Research paper**

You must send me a written proposal for your research paper no later than Feb. 10. The pitch must include a description of the ethical question or professional trend in news media you hope to research. It must also include some links to preliminary research you've done in choosing the topic and a list of primary and secondary sources you expect to consult in your research. (Please make sure they exist before you cite them.)

The final paper should be at least 2,500 words in length. *It must include your research question, your research method, a thesis, reporting to support the thesis and a conclusion.* It also must include 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 include some interviews with sources who have first-hand knowledge of the subject.

Warning: You may 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 allow to respond in the paper.

**Key deadlines:**

- I’ll expect a first draft of the research paper in my office and by email by noon Friday, March 17. This draft will include the introduction (the research question and what makes it compelling, newsworthy, timely, etc.), your method (how you intend to explore this: sources, data, studies you'll use.), a working thesis statement (a good sentence explaining your conclusion so far) and enough of the reporting for me to see that you're on the right track. I expect to see at least 1,000 words.
• A hard copy and an email version of the final draft are due in class on Wednesday, Dec 9. The final draft will include entire paper, along with footnotes and endnotes citing your sources. Inserting both is easy in Word. Here’s a good style guide for how to write them.

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 forums. 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, 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. We call that double-dipping. 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.

More to come

A class-by-class presentation schedule will follow as soon as I’ve assigned topics to all students.