

SCHOOL OF MEDIA STUDIES
BACHELOR'S PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS AND TRANSFER STUDENTS
THE SCHOOLS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
SPRING, 2016

MEDIA ETHICS (NCOM 3048 A; CRN 7055)
Wednesdays 6-7:50 PM
JAN 27 – MAY 11
66 West 12TH Street, Room 517

Instructor: Jen Heuson, PhD
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office hours by appointment

Course Description

This course provides a theoretical foundation that enables students to identify and analyze ethical issues in the media. Students are familiarized with scholarly literature and case studies on media ethics and apply ethical decision-making strategies to current and past media practices. Emphasis is on the ethical and moral dilemmas that news, social media, advertising, public relations, and entertainment organizations face in conjunction with their professional obligations and market pressures. Concurrently, we analyze the societal implications resulting from ethical dilemmas and the role of media in relationship to social justice, freedom, diversity, and responsibility.

Ethical questions presented include: Do the media have a special obligation to ethical behavior and to what extent might that impact public access to a “free marketplace of ideas?” Do advertising and journalism operate under the same ethical rules? How much information should the media provide about the private lives of public figures? What are the parameters of privacy afforded to users of social media and search engines? How is intellectual property and copyright defined on the Internet? What role should competition and profit motives play in news reporting?

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, a student should possess the following abilities and knowledge:

- Identify, use, compare, and contrast major ethical approaches and decision-making strategies;
- Apply critical thinking skills to ethical and moral dilemmas;
- Analyze media messages, issues, and cases in terms of their ethical and moral implications;
- Evaluate diverse approaches, practices, and effects within media using logical reasoning and effective writing and debate;
- Develop personal and professional codes of ethics for work as a media professional;
- Understand the major ethical approaches that have affected decision making in the media today as well as the role of professionals in shaping those decisions;
- Understand the complex relationship between technological, social, cultural, and economic effects on the media and how those impact decision-making; and
- Understand how to make complex moral decisions as a media practitioner by considering all affected parties, assessing differences between functional and moral obligations, and ordering moral priorities.

Course Requirements

Required Texts

This course has three required texts. Texts can be purchased through The New School bookstore at Barnes & Noble located at Union Square. Texts can also be purchased online through Barnes & Noble and Amazon. *Media Ethics* is available as a semester rental through Barnes & Noble online. All texts will also be available through Course Reserves at the University Center Library.

Ethics: A Very Short Introduction by Simon Blackburn (Oxford University Press, 2001).
ISBN-10: 0192804421 (\$8 paperback/\$7 eBook)

Media Ethics: Key Issues for Responsible Practice, Second Edition by Patrick Lee Plaisance
(Sage Publications, 2014). ISBN-10: 1452258082 (\$64 Paperback/\$52 eBook/\$16 rental)

Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis by Roger Silverstone (Polity Press, 2007).
ISBN-10: 0745635040 (\$22 paperback/\$15 eBook)

Online Component

This course will use CANVAS to distribute information, including the course syllabus and detailed assignment guidelines. Students are also required to post weekly reading responses to our CANVAS site. To access CANVAS, go to <http://my.newschoo1.edu/>, log on and click on the “CANVAS” icon in the upper left of the window. Select “MediaEthics.A.Sp16” to access our course. Weekly responses should be posted to the corresponding “Discussions” thread.

Email

Please check your email regularly. I will use email to notify the class of any schedule or assignment changes. Email is also a way for you to ask me basic questions or to schedule an appointment to discuss more complicated questions. Please also use email to let me know if you will be absent (24 hrs in advance). I generally respond to my email within 48 hours.

Students are required to submit their midterm and final assignments via email. Assignments should be sent as PDF files to heusonj@newschoo1.edu no later than 4PM on the due date.

Assignments

Students are expected to complete the required readings and assignments BEFORE the start of class. All written work is due no later than 4PM on the due date. Weekly reading responses must be posted to the corresponding “Discussions” thread on our CANVAS site. The midterm and final assignments must be submitted via email, preferably as PDF files. Assignment details will be discussed in advance. Below is a list of required assignments:

1. Weekly reading responses: Students will post a 250-word response to a reading discussion question. Responses will be posted to CANVAS by 4PM.
2. Position papers and debates: Students will write a 5-page position paper on an ethical topic related to the media. Topics must be selected by FEB 24. Papers are due MAR 16. Students will present position papers during class debates on MAR 30 and APR 6.
3. Maker proposals: Students will write a 5-page proposal for a media project that addresses an ethical or moral dilemma. Proposal topics will be shared in class on APR 13. Final proposals are due on MAY 11.

Final Grade Calculation

Weekly reading responses x 10	20 (2% each)
Midterm position paper	20
Position paper debate	10
Final maker proposal	30
Participation and attendance	20

Grading Criteria

To receive a grade for this course, you must complete and hand in all assignments and actively participate in classroom discussions. Assignments will be graded in part on how well the criteria of the assignment are met. These criteria will be distributed and discussed as assigned. Written work will be evaluated based on logical argumentation, engagement with course concepts, and general standards of academic writing (e.g. proper citation of sources). Oral work will be evaluated based on respectful and responsible discussion and engagement with course concepts.

The following grading scale will be used:

93 – 100 = A
90 – 92 = A -
87 – 89 = B +
84 – 86 = B
80 – 83 = B -
77 – 79 = C +
74 – 76 = C
70 – 73 = C -
69 or less = F

Course Policies

Attendance

The New School requires all credit students attend every class. Since this is a vast subject compressed into a very small period of time and is discussion based, attendance is critical. If you must be absent, please notify me in advance via email. While credit students are allowed one absence, keep in mind that missing class means you are missing out on important discussions and assignment details. It is your responsibility to make up work missed in class. One absence will not affect your grade. Two absences will result in a half letter grade reduction. Three absences will result in a full drop in a letter grade. Four absences will result in failure of the class.

It is every student's right to fail. There are circumstances where students cannot, for some external reason, fulfill the minimum attendance requirement of the class. While these are often personal and difficult circumstances, I do not make judgments about them. The class requirements remain the same for everyone.

Participation

Participation is a crucial part of this course. Not only is it 20% of your final grade, but respectful and responsible discussion is the foundation of media ethics. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss ethical and moral dilemmas as members of a community. Openness to dialogue, respect for classmates, and thoughtful speech are critical to your success in this course.

Lateness

Class will start promptly at 6PM. The door to the classroom will be closed at that time. Please show up on time. Anyone walking in more than 5 minutes after the class has begun will be marked late. More than two instances of lateness will be marked as an absence. Showing up more than 20 minutes late or leaving more than 20 minutes early will also be considered an absence.

Late Assignments

Written assignments are due via CANVAS or email NO LATER THAN 4PM on the due date. In class work is due ON the day you are scheduled to present. Technical issues, illness, or other problems do not alter due dates. Late assignments will be downgraded one letter grade per week.

Incompletes

No incompletes will be given in this class. For anyone needing a grade, the absolute last day to turn in work is MAY 11.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and other Devices

Please turn off your cell phone before you enter class. There is absolutely no cell phone use and no texting during class! If you have an urgent message, please leave class to respond. You may use laptops and other devices for note taking or eBooks. Use of devices to check email or other social media during class time will automatically count as an absence.

Course Outline

This course is divided into three basic modules, covering the 1) foundation, 2) application, and 3) integration of ethical and moral principles into the consumption and production of media today. The following outline details the basic topics, readings, and assignments to be covered weekly.

MODULE I: FOUNDATIONS IN MEDIA ETHICS

Week 1. JAN 27 Introduction: Ethics, Morals, and the Media
Introductions. Review of course requirements and policies. Discuss differences between ethical and moral principles and how these inform contemporary media environments.

Week 2. FEB 03 Assessing Ethical and Moral Dilemmas
Review foundational ethical and moral ideas and their application to real-world problems. Practice posing ethical and moral questions and understanding what constitutes a dilemma.
Reading: *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*
Assignment: weekly reading response 1

Week 3. FEB 10 Understanding Ethical Principles
Introduce key ethical thinkers from Aristotle and Kant to Mill, Rawls, and Benhabib. Discuss transformations in ethical principles and the application of ethical models to practical and moral problems. Focused discussion of means versus ends and virtue, duty, and consequentialist ethics.
Reading: Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Media Ethics*
Assignment: weekly reading response 2

Week 4. FEB 17 Ethical Theories of Media
Discuss key ethical principles involved in media consumption and production. Practice developing ethical codes and applying ethical reasoning to mediated dilemmas.
Reading: Chapter 3 of *Media Ethics*
Assignment: weekly reading response 3

MODULE II: APPLYING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Week 5. FEB 24 Technology and Transparency
Discuss ethical values and dilemmas related to technology and transparency. Focused debate on problems of technological determinism, values in design, and mediated sense. Focus also on dilemmas of media transparency, such as accountability versus protection.
Reading: Chapters 4 and 5 of *Media Ethics*
Assignment: weekly reading response 4
Select position paper topics.

Week 6. MAR 2 Justice and Harm
Discuss ethical values and dilemmas related to justice and harm. Focused debate on the role of mass media in promoting social justice and protecting global citizens from harm. Discuss examples such as fairness in journalism, sex in advertising, and protection from cyber bullying.
Reading: Chapters 6 and 7 of *Media Ethics*
Assignment: weekly reading response 5

Week 7. MAR 9 Autonomy and Privacy
Discuss ethical values and dilemmas related to autonomy and privacy. Focused discussion of moral autonomy, including free will, and the moral value of privacy. Focus on media autonomy and privacy in relation to corporate structures, funding issues, public demands, and the law.
Reading: Chapters 8 and 9 of *Media Ethics*
Assignment: weekly reading response 6

Week 8. MAR 16

Community and Morality

Discuss ethical values and dilemmas related to community and morality. Focused debate on the obligations of media to creating just and moral public spheres. Focus on the formation of publics and counter publics through journalism, public relations, and social media.

Reading: Chapters 10 and 11 of *Media Ethics*

Assignment: weekly reading response 7

Final position papers are due.

MAR 23 – SPRING BREAK

Week 9. **MAR 30** Position paper debates

Week 10. **APR 6** Position paper debates

MODULE III: ETHICAL AND MORAL MAKING

Week 11. APR 13

Morality and the Media

Introduce notion of “mediapolis” and its relationship to morality. Discuss framework for obligation versus rights based models of media making. Focused debate on differences between representational and responsibility ethics and on the role of communication in shaping publicness.

Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of *Media and Morality*

Assignment: weekly reading response 8

Share maker proposal ideas in class.

Week 12. APR 20

Case Studies in Mediated Morality

Discuss the mediated formation of morality through close examination of two case studies: 1) the public shaping of a “rhetoric of evil” in U.S. media since the Cold War and 2) the counterpublics of “otherness” shaped through European minority media in reaction to imperial conquest.

Reading: Chapters 3 and 4 of *Media and Morality*

Assignment: weekly reading response 9

Week 13. APR 27

The Mediapolis, Hospitality, and Justice

Discuss the notion of “proper distance” as a measure for ethical media consumption and production. Focused debate on the application of “media hospitality” to moral media making and on the tensions between responsibility and justice in shaping mediated publicness.

Reading: Chapters 5 and 6 of *Media and Morality*

Assignment: weekly reading response 10

Week 14. MAY 4

Regulation and Moral Literacy

Discuss applications of “media hospitality” by makers and consumers. Focused debate on the roles of regulation and education in the future formation of a more moral media culture.

Reading: Chapters 7 of *Media and Morality*

Week 15. MAY 11

Conclusion: Ethical and Moral Making

Summaries. Conclude with focused debate on student case studies in ethical and moral making. Discuss the key media dilemmas encountered and how these were assessed using ethical principles and moral judgments. Focus on development of codes for future making.

Assignment: **Final maker proposals are due.**

University Resources & Policies

Resources

The university provides many resources to help students achieve academic and artistic excellence.

These resources include:

The University (and associated) Libraries: <http://library.newschool.edu>

The University Learning Center: <http://www.newschool.edu/learning-center>

University Disabilities Services: <http://www.newschool.edu/student-services/studentdisabilityservices>

In keeping with the university's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with me privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to contact Student Disability Service (SDS). SDS will conduct an intake and, if appropriate, the Director will provide an academic accommodation notification letter for you to bring to me. At that point, I will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course.

Academic Honesty and Integrity

Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university. Students are responsible for understanding the University's policy on academic honesty and integrity and must make use of proper citations of sources for writing papers, creating, presenting, and performing their work, taking examinations, and doing research. It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others.

The full text of the policy, including adjudication procedures, is found at:

<http://www.newschool.edu/leadership/provost/policies>

Intellectual Property Rights: <http://www.newschool.edu/leadership/provost/policies>

Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent. Late papers, failure to complete the readings assigned for class discussion, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

Attendance

Each class of the semester is important. Attendance and participation is not only part of your grade, it is also part the learning process. The rest of the semester frequently builds upon what occurs in class in the first two weeks—in other words, during the add-drop period.

Federal regulations require that the university monitor attendance for all degree students and notify the appropriate agency of any student receiving financial aid who has not attended a 15-week onsite class for 2 (two) or more consecutive weeks. With respect to grading, the policy for SUS/SMS conforms closely to the federal regulation: after missing 3 (three) onsite classes, a student's grade drops one full letter. Upon missing 4 (four) classes, the student fails the course.

Participation

Class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading, contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, and coming to class regularly and on time.

Delays

In rare instances, I may be delayed arriving to class. If I have not arrived by the time class is scheduled to start, you must wait a minimum of 30 minutes. In the event that I will miss class, a sign will be posted at the classroom indicating your assignment for the next class meeting.