Media Ethics in a Digital Age &
Diversity Issues in Journalism
3180:0001
Spring 2018
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
The University of Iowa

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CLASS LOCATIONS AND TIMES: Room 327, EPB, 3:30 – 4:45 p.m., Mondays and Wednesdays

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
The School of Journalism and Mass Communications recognizes several core goals in all courses offered.
In this course, we will primarily focus on Media Ethics and Diversity, as follows:
Learning Objective 1. Students will demonstrate an ability to anticipate and recognize ethical issues when they arise and to reason through them taking multiple perspectives and contexts into account.
Learning Objective 2. Students will demonstrate an ability to explain their ethical approaches and reasoning about a particular dilemma in terms that can be understood by a diverse group of people.
We also will cover certain Multi-Cultural Issues, as follows:
Learning Objective 1: Students will demonstrate an ability to produce media that serve the needs and interests of diverse communities and reflect their voices and experiences.
Learning Objective 2: Students will demonstrate sensitivity to and understanding of the cultures, histories, perspectives, and socio-economic and political situations of diverse groups.
Learning Objective 3: Students will demonstrate an ability to work with members of diverse groups to engage publicly over issues of community interest.

CLASS GREETINGS, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:
Personal confession: I’m an Internet, newspaper, and magazine junkie. I’m a sucker for great nonfiction writing and can’t-put-it-down journalism. I go weak at the knees in the presence of a skilled storyteller. Terrific journalism can make for a lofty goal: to create meaning out of the world. It’s what the best journalists do — make meaning out of seemingly disparate events that combined, illuminated, and told in a compelling manner, create a new and important vantage point from which to assess your part of the world. That’s what makes good journalism great, and what transforms good journalists into great journalists.
This syllabus gives a general outline of what to expect in this course. It breaks down the semester into weekly segments. The first several classes will be a walk-through of some basic journalistic practices and tenets. The rationale: to make certain everyone is (more or less) on the same level. Note: Some students in this course will be journalism majors, others will not. That you are a non-major may make the first several class sessions sound as though I’m talking in a foreign language. Soon, though, we’ll all be on the same page. If there are still terms or concepts unfamiliar to you, please ask me to explain. There are no stupid questions. We’re all in this course to learn; we all are here to learn what students with varying interests and backgrounds can bring to the classroom.

The course has two main goals: to identify, explore and debate key issues raised about contemporary American journalism/media; and to develop skills in analyzing these issues. The overarching concern will be ethics and diversity, particularly in the context of digital media.

The course is really two classes wrapped into one: a lecture and a seminar. The syllabus provides an attempt of an outline; the main topics of discussions will flow from news events that happen during the semester, and as such, depending on what transpires over the next 15 weeks, we may vary widely from the syllabus. In other words, the syllabus is merely scaffolding on which to base a series of important elements students ought to learn. But we may diverge from it considerably. We’ll see.

Fasten your seatbelts. We will go where the news takes us. And during the second year of a new administration in Washington, D.C., there should be a lot! This semester ought to take us to a lot of wild and wooly places. We will discuss how the Government and the Press clash. We will discuss fake news stories. We will discuss how the press coverage can be slanted, and how government spokespeople are often ministers of propaganda. In discussing these issues, we will address them in an engaging, non-partisan manner. Whether you support President Trump or not, whether you are a Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Green Party member, or Independent, we will be engaged in fiercely analyzing press performance as it relates to fundamental issues of democracy.

The overarching emphasis will be American journalism, and as such, we’ll spend time looking at various editorial, financial, and ethical issues that affect journalists and the outlets they work for. We will examine the changing role digital media play in the dispersal of information. We will focus our discussion on the intersection of traditional media and emerging forms of New Media, as well as on contemporary ethical dilemmas reporters and editors face. Much of the discussion will cover issues of diversity in micro and macro ways.

We will probe the long-term convention of U.S. journalism and publishing, which mandates an institutional “top-down” perspective. U.S. media are (as are almost all global media) decidedly government-centric. What the government says gets reported — usually on page one or immediately in our 24/7 “feed-the-beast” media machine. When the president/congressperson/Fed chairman/mayor/coach opens his/her mouth, whatever comes out gets reported. It’s news. Or so they say it’s news.

But are Tweets from the President news? Are government assertions that are inaccurate and untruthful news? When should the media critically interpret and when shall it merely report without any analysis? Can news coverage even be objective? What’s the difference between news, information, and public relations. These are questions we will address.
Distinct from politics, when it comes to feature stories, or coverage of arts, science, fashion, sports, business and culture, often we get from the popular media is filtered public relations. “News” about celebrities is concocted by teams of publicity agents; what they say seldom has any basis in fact. If it does, the “news” lacks a larger framework or context. Anyone who’s anyone in today’s media landscape has spokesmen/women, press secretaries, reps, or just “people” who primp (and pimp) their clients’ public persona and project it for us to see. In many ways, the media is complicit in such meaningless reporting.

Example: When Beyonce announces she’s expecting, it’s the lead story in thousands of magazines, blogs, newspapers, TV shows. It’s Beyonce’s people want, what millions of media consumers seem to crave, what bean counters live for. Everyone makes out nicely, thank you. But is Beyonce’s pregnancy that important in the context of the world and what’s truly essential to our lives?

In other words, is it news?

By the way, such non-event coverage isn’t new or different; it’s how the media have operated for more than a century. But because media outlets have become so bottom-line, profit-driven over the last decade, and because more and more journalists have lost their jobs in the same time period, what gets printed, broadcast or blogged today is often exactly what public-relations practitioners—including the government—have packaged for public consumption.

Be prepared to discuss the news and how it is covered. For the next semester, you will be media critics. You will have license to be opinionated.

**In fact, ten percent of your grade will be based on class participation. Receiving an A in the course will be nearly impossible unless you contribute in a meaningful way throughout the semester.**

Think critically. Think concretely (and abstractly) about how American journalism could be ideally reconfigured so you might become better informed, educated, entertained and engaged (all at the same time). Think about the goals and purposes of journalism in the noblest light, as well as the reality of journalism today and what could happen in the future.

There is no textbook, although we will follow a protocol of discussing case studies of ethical issues each Monday. There are multiple case studies on ICON we will discuss; please read all case studies per their insertion in the syllabus. I suggest you print out each case study and keep it in a binder to help organize your study.

As outlined in the syllabus, on **Mondays**, we will discuss the case studies. You will need to be prepared to discuss the case studies each Monday, so please be prepared.

On **Wednesdays**, we will have a more far-ranging discussion, based on critiquing ethical issues that have transpired during the week, as covered in the news. As such, we will be looking at coverage of events in the following online new sites: *The Iowa City Press-Citizen, Gazette, Des Moines Register, and New York Times.*

**ASSESSMENTS/EVALUATIONS:**
There will be three assessments/evaluations of your knowledge about media ethics and their application today’s journalism marketplace. These will be multiple-choice tests. If students engage in
class every session, take notes, and participate in the ensuing discussion, these evaluations should pose no problem in students executing them well.

Below are the date of those assessments:

1) First Assessment/Evaluation  February 7
2) Midterm Assessment/Evaluation  March 7
3) Optional Extra Credit Assignment  April 18
4) Third Assessment/Evaluation  May 2

Below is a breakdown of the components that make up students’ final grades:

1) Class discussion: 10 percent
2) First Assessment/Evaluation 30 percent
3) Midterm Assessment/Evaluation 30 percent
4) Third Assessment/Evaluation 30 percent

*Extra Credit Assignment  25 percent

GRADING:
If students are distressed about their grades in this course, please meet with the professor or TA as the semester progresses. (It’s a good idea to meet, even if you’re not distressed about your grades.) Don’t wait till the last week or the last month. The assessments/evaluations will be based on a curve of students’ performance; the following grid will generally be applied to the three assessments/evaluations, the Extra Credit Assignment, and final grades:

A 93 and above
A- 90-92
B+ 87-89
B 83-86
B- 80-82
C+ 77-79
C 73-76
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D 63-66
D- 60-62
F 59 and below

Students should expect to spend at least two hours per week per semester hour preparing for this class and completing assignments. This means a minimum of eight hours per week.

Exceptional work is expected.

The Extra Credit Assignment (ECA) can tremendously boost your grade. Examples of successful assignments are posted on ICON, and can be viewed in the publication, NewsJump. The requirements for the ECA are to interview at least two professional journalists about a story they have produced during the spring term. These interviews may be conducted via email, in person, or over the phone. Students must first identify a story that raises provocative issues in its content or approach, and then question the journalists about their approach, as well as the genesis of the article under review. The ECA should be between 1,000 and 1,200 words. Students are advised to discuss with the professor or TA prior to researching the ECA. Merely executing the ECA is no guarantee that any points will be accrued for the student; executed with precision and insight, the ECA can earn a student a maximum of 25 extra points in the course.
OTHER NOTES:
1) Be prepared to participate. You ought to volunteer. Your ongoing engagement and participation is vital to the course’s success. Fellow students and I will be depending on you to bring clarity and enthusiasm to our discussions. How can you shine (and avoid horrible embarrassment)? By reading the text before the class begins, as well as by reading and digesting the above news sites.

2) ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. IT IS NOT OPTIONAL. YOU MUST ATTEND EACH CLASS. ROLL WILL BE TAKEN. If you must miss a class because of illness, an emergency, or a University-sanctioned activity, you must e-mail me prior to the beginning of class. No kidding. If you miss two classes without notifying me, you are courting disaster. The class will be run as a seminar, and as such, your ongoing attendance, engagement and participation will be vital to its success. Fellow students and I will be depending on you to bring clarity and enthusiasm to all of our discussions. If you don’t show up, we may worry about you, too. Since meaningful class participation is factored into your grade in a big way (15 percent), missing classes will negatively affect your grade in a profound way. Merely showing up for class and delivering the required assignments is not a substitution for active and significant participation.

3) Arrive on time. Late arrivals interrupt the class and are a discourtesy to other students. Recurrent tardiness is a sign of immaturity, bad planning, personal-transportation issues (all bad raps for writers, journalists, academics, anyone). Don’t be late.

4) Turn off your cell phone and portable computer during class. Note taking must be done by hand. No text messaging, checking your email, surfing the web will be allowed during class (unless part of an assignment). If you do any of these, you will be asked to leave on the spot. Stay off the grid; you’ll enjoy the experience.

5) Dress appropriately. No pajamas (sorry to mention that, but it has happened). I’d suggest removing your hat. Treat the class with respect, as you would a job. This is your job for the next 15 weeks.

6) Look, act, and be alert. Get enough sleep. Come to class prepared to engage. If you must yawn, cover your mouth. Don’t smell your hair or go through it for split ends. If you must leave during class, have the courtesy not to do it in the first 30 minutes.

7) Discuss questions with the professor or TA. No questions are stupid. We are here to serve you. If you’d like to talk about the readings, about a career in journalism/writing, or what happens after you graduate, the professor would very much welcome a visit.

9) Plagiarism, or the use of others’ work as one’s own, is a violation of university, academic, and journalistic standards. Anyone who plagiarizes will receive a grade of F in the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, ask. Students who commit academic fraud, dishonesty, or cheating will be subject to the rules and regulations of the School, College, and University. Students are expected to be honest and honorable in their fulfillment of assignments. All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College’s Code of Academic Honesty: “I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty.” Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

10) Students have a responsibility to the rest of the class to help create a classroom environment where everyone learns. Students are expected to follow guidelines set by the School, College, and
University.

11) If students want to publish their work, do so after the piece is submitted for this class.

12) Any assignment for this course must be original and must be written by the student for this class. If students submit work not originated or written by them, they will receive an F for the course.

13) The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which include but are not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/

14) Students with suggestions or complaints about anything that happens in this course should not hesitate to contact the instructor. If a problem cannot be resolved within the structure of the course, students are encouraged to contact David Ryfe, Director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (335-3486) in AJB 305. If a satisfactory outcome is not obtained, students are then urged to discuss such issues with personnel in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (the administrative home of the School and this course) and submit a complaint to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs, 120 Schaeffer Hall, (335-2633). Please consult the Liberal Arts Bulletin for a full discussion of grievance procedures.

15) Sexual harassment undermines the mission of the University and threatens the wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff. Sexual harassment in any form will not be tolerated.

16) University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondence sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Please check your university email several times a day.

17) In severe weather, class members should seek shelter in the basement of EPB. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.

_The Iowa Dozen_

Students in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication are expected to learn the following principles, which — when spelled out — become _The Iowa Dozen_. In this course, we will be particularly concerned with items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12.

We learn:
1. to write correctly and clearly
2. to conduct research and gather information responsibly
3. to edit and evaluate carefully
4. to use media technologies thoughtfully
5. to apply statistical concepts appropriately

We value:
6. First Amendment principles for all individuals and groups
7. a diverse global community
8. creativity and independence
9. truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

We explore:
10. mass communication theories and concepts
11. media institutions and practices
12. the role of media in shaping culture
CLASS SCHEDULE

News events are by nature unpredictable. This course attempts to track as closely as possible the news of the day. Here is the tentative schedule as the course starts.

Week No. 1
Wednesday, January 17, 2018
Introduction; course overview; expectations; assignments; grading.
George Orwell poster. The flashlight: shining a light into dark corners. Passing around Chicago Tribune vending machine: “Ideas Sold Here.” Journalists make sense out of the world. What exactly is news? How is it different from information?

Week No. 2
Monday/Wednesday, January 22/24, 2018
Course shakedown. Description of terms.
Case studies: 2, 6, 7, 9.
Institutional nature of news coverage.
Celebrity news vs. news about the baker, butcher, barista, bartender, barber.
Paper-based newspapers vs. the Internet: Examples of the possible:
— New York Times’ One-in-Eight-Million series
— Lexington Herald-Leader’s Healthcare in Rural Kentucky
http://www.heraldleaderphoto.com/2008/06/29/audio-slideshow-clinically-impressive/
— Tobacco Cutting Contest
http://vimeo.com/6835871
In the daily/hourly/minute-by-minute news mix that we get, seldom do we find stories of working-class, middle-class, or poor people. Untelegenic people need not worry. Their stories will be ignored. Main Street has ceded any relevance it may once have had to inside the Washington Beltway, or to the nation’s twin citadels of media muscle — New York and Los Angeles. Take a look at the famous 1976 Saul Steinberg New Yorker cover (with D.C. and L.A. all grown up). Discuss: “New York calling!”
Week No. 3  
Monday/Wednesday, January 29/31, 2018  
Case studies: 10, 11, 13, 14.  
If there’s a compelling story outside the media’s customary geographic contours, it’s about a  
hurricane, tornado, fire, earthquake, perhaps multiple murders (school massacres are favorites).  
Pestilence must reign. Riveting images are essential. If it bleeds, it leads.  
Stories about ordinary people in out-of-the-way flyover country just don’t make it into the mix. If  
they do, their toast after several days. The rare story outside our comfort zone is an outlier.  
Mainstream American consumers are apparently accustomed to (and seemingly comfortable with)  
such a impoverished media menu.  
A look at StoryCorps:  
— http://storycorps.org/listen/monique-ferrer/
— A brief look at The Oxford Project:
— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lwUA8jZFlg

**Week No. 4**
Monday/Wednesday, February 5/7, 2018
American Exceptionalism: We look at an amazing clip from HBO’s *Newsroom*:
— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMqcLUqYqrs
We look at clips from *Hearts and Minds*:
— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huFh760p-MA&noredirect=1
Herman Cain and President Trump:
— https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1E5NmmySy0&noredirect=1
Iowa Exceptionalism, and how it affects local and regional news. Hometown boosterism and Agenda Journalism.
How the Iowa press looks at itself.
**First Assessment/Evaluation**

**Week No. 5**
Monday/Wednesday, February 12/14, 2018
Case studies: 18, 19, 20, 22.

**Week No. 6**
Monday/Wednesday, February 19/21, 2018
Case studies: 24, 25, 26.
Has objectivity become passé? The difference between truth and accuracy. “Absence of Malice” on sharks and fish. Is objectivity a goal or a method? Is it possible? Should fairness and balance be journalistic goals? Is journalistic balance always justified? How about just telling it “like it is?”

**Week No. 7**
Monday/Wednesday, February 26/28, 2018
Case studies: 27, 28, 29, 31.
Dancer Falls Tape.
Suicide on the C&O. The story of Frank, and “Cruel Exploitation of a Tragedy.”
Politically correct newsrooms? Seductions of power. Whatever happened to “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable” Media handlers; spin doctors; how politicians, business bulldoze past the press to bring their message directly to the people.

**Week No. 8**
Monday/Wednesday, March 5/7, 2018
Case studies: 33, 34, 35, 36.
The Wheaties Test.
How we cover death. Obituaries vs. death notices.
Casualty of war:
http://www.collateralmurder.com/
**Midterm Assessment /Evaluation**
SPRING BREAK

Week No. 9
Monday/Wednesday, March 19/21, 2018
Case studies: 37, 38, 47.

Week No. 10
Monday/Wednesday, March 26/28, 2018
NYT Op-Docs

Week No. 11
Monday/Wednesday, April 2/4, 2018
Case studies: 48.
Ethics and coverage of news. Paying for coverage.
Controlling the press has never been easier. A ravaged, eviscerated U.S. media is a serious casualty in any democracy, and more and politicians and image-makers are turning this malady to their advantage.

Week No. 12
Monday/Wednesday, April 9/11, 2018
Open
Optional Extra Credit Assignment, due April 18

Week No. 13
Monday/Wednesday, April 16/18, 2018
Monetizing the web. How.
Optional Extra Credit Assignment due

Week No. 14
Monday/Wednesday, April 23/25, 2018
In today’s media environment where distinctions are blurred more than ever, who is a journalist? Are bloggers journalists? And, more broadly, what is journalism for?

Week No. 15
Monday/Wednesday, April 30 and May 2, 2018
Catch-up; review; the news of tomorrow.
Items All University of Iowa Students Need To Know
Where you fit in.
Third Assessment/Evaluation

The above is an approximation. This is a course in news as it develops. Accordingly, we will adjust our purview as the semester progresses.