Media Ethics in a Digital Age &
Diversity Issues in Journalism
3180:0001
Fall 2017
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
The University of Iowa

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CLASS LOCATIONS AND TIMES: E205, Adler Journalism Building, 3:30 – 4:45 p.m., Monday and
Wednesday

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 three main goals: to identify, explore and debate key issues raised about contemporary American journalism/media; to develop skills in analyzing these issues; and to exercise talent in writing critiques about such 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 first term of a new administration in Washington, D.C., there shoule 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 analysis 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 Jenn announces she’s expecting twins, it’s the lead story in thousands of magazines, blogs, newspapers, TV shows. It’s what Jenn’s people want, what millions of media consumers seem to crave, what bean counters live for. Everyone makes out nicely, thank you. But is Jenn’s twins’ 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 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, 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 will be handouts; I suggest you keep a binder to keep and organize them.

As outlined in the syllabus, on **Mondays**, we will discuss the case studies as outlined in the textbook. You will need to be prepared to discuss the case studies each Tuesday, so please be prepared. We won’t discuss *all* case studies in the textbook, so follow the syllabus to learn which we will discuss.

**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 newssites: *The Iowa City Press-Citizen, Gazette, Des Moines Register, and New York Times*. You are required to read at least two of these media for the day preceeding the class, Wednesday, as well as the day of the class, Thursday. You can pick up a hard copy of the paper or read its content online.
WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:
Students will produce three Op. Ed. pieces. The format of these articles should be similar to that of Op. Ed. pieces that appear in national blogs and media sites assessing press coverage and ethics. For these assignments, please do not choose news covered in *The Daily Iowan*, since that paper is primarily run by fellow students.

What is an Op. Ed. piece? Op.Ed. stands for Opposite the Editorial Page; it’s a story that traditionally appears opposite the editorial page in a newspaper, and consists of a well-reasoned essay of opinion.

Each student will choose three different topics for their Op. Ed. pieces. The assignment asks students to assess press coverage of a specific event, and explain why the coverage cited is inadequate, unreasonably biased or suspect. The Op. Ed. pieces should reflect how specific issues or events during the course of the fall term are portrayed in electronic and/or print media, and offer suggestions for how such coverage ought to be improved in a manner that is practical and relevant.

In these assignments, students are expected to form and express their own substantiated viewpoints. These pieces should be between 800 – 1,000 words each, or if you choose to use multi-media, about three-minutes (please present me with a flash drive containing the material on the date due).

Examples of successful Op. Ed. essays will be shared with the class to provide students with a template of what is expected.

Below are deadlines of work required in this course:
1) First Op. Ed. piece, due September 11
2) Second Op. Ed. piece, due October 2
3) Midterm Evaluation, October 9
5) Final Evaluation, December 6

Below is a breakdown of the components that make up students’ final grades:
1) Class discussion: 10 percent
2) First Op. Ed piece 15 percent
3) Second Op. Ed. piece 20 percent
4) Midterm Evaluation: 15 percent
5) Third Op. Ed. piece: 20 percent
5) Final Evaluation 20 percent

The reason for the differential between the assignments and evaluations is to allow students a learning curve to become more comfortable with the format and requirements.

GRADING:
Grading is an inexact science, particularly when it comes to writing. If students are distressed about their grades in this course, please meet with me as the semester progresses. (It’s a good idea to meet with me, even if you’re not distressed about your grades.) Don’t wait till the last week or the last month. Your assignments will be evaluated on several factors: thoroughness, organization, originality,
enterprise, focus, clarity, precision, concision, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Don’t pad your papers (I will notice). Every single word ought to be essential to the telling of your story.

Below is a breakdown of standards used in evaluating student work, with pluses/minuses as indicators within each letter range. The designation of A+ will be awarded only in extraordinary cases:

A--Exceptionally well written; arresting and probing, thoroughly researched and analyzed. Publishable as is.

B--Basically clear, cohesive, well thought out and well researched, with minor problems of style and organization. Needs some further revision and/or additional material.

C--Superficial, with organizational, stylistic, punctuation, grammar problems; missing vital detail. A major rewrite and additional research required.

D--Serious problems in both form and content. Requires substantial additional research and thought before a successful rewrite can be attempted.

F--Incomplete, confusing, fatal grammatical and syntactic flaws, which makes the piece unacceptable.

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.

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) Students must deliver their assignments by deadline — the beginning of the class when the assignment is due. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED. No assignment will be accepted unless it is typed and double-spaced or presented on a flash drive, or as a link. Binders are not necessary, just the assignment (if paper, stapled; no paperclips, no torn corners). Students should keep a copy of their work. Proofread; use a spell-checker; read the work again. Then read it again. Then again. Polish it. Be your best editor.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) 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.

6) 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.

7) 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.

8) Discuss your work with the instructor. No questions are stupid. Given a couple of days, the instructor will be delighted to review drafts of an article. The instructor is 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 instructor 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) All assignments 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 Adler Journalism
Building. 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
Monday/Wednesday, August 21/23, 2017
Introduction; course overview; expectations; assignments; grading.
What exactly is news? How is it different from information?

Week No. 2
Monday/Wednesday, August 28/30, 2017
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.
Week No. 3
Wednesday, September 6
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/
Week No. 4
Monday/Wednesday, September 11/13, 2017
Case studies: 10, 11, 13, 14.

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=1E5NmmnySy0&noredirect=1
Iowa Exceptionalism, and how it affects local and regional news. Hometown boosterism and Agenda Journalism.
How the Iowa press looks at itself.

Week No. 5
Monday/Wednesday, September 18/20, 2017
Case studies: 18, 19, 20, 22.

Week No. 6
Monday/Wednesday, September 25/27, 2017
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, October 2/4, 2017
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, October 9/11, 2017
Case studies: 33, 34, 35, 36.
The Wheaties Test.
How we cover death.
Casualty of war:
http://www.collateralmurder.com/
Midterm Evaluation
Week No. 9
Monday/Wednesday, October 16/18, 2017
Case studies: 37, 38, 40, 47.

Week No. 10
Monday/Wednesday, October 23/25
NYT Op-Docs

Week No. 11
Monday/Wednesday, October 30/November 1, 2017
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, November 6/8, 2017
Open

Week No. 13
Monday/Wednesday, November 13/15, 2017
Monetizing the web. How.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week No. 14
Monday/Wednesday, November 27/29, 2017
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, December 4/6, 2017
Catch-up; review; the news of tomorrow.
Items All University of Iowa Students Need To Know Where you fit in.
Final Evaluation