

JOURNALISM ETHICS

JMC 4833/5833

Instructor: David Craig
Office: 3000 Gaylord Hall
Office hours: By appointment
Office phone: 325-5206
E-mail: dcraig@ou.edu
Twitter: @dcraigok

Required texts

Patrick Lee Plaisance, **Media Ethics: Key Principles for Responsible Practice** 2nd ed. (2014)
Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, **Media Ethics: Issues and Cases**, 8th ed. (2014)

Other readings listed in syllabus or TBA. Of particular importance is the overview of nine key virtues on website of the OU Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing, <http://www.ou.edu/content/flourish/virtues.html>.

(Additional readings for graduate students in longer essay assignment)

Course outcomes

- All students will understand the nature and value of nine virtues that enable an ethical work life in journalism and other media fields (open-mindedness, intellectual humility, love of learning, honesty, perseverance, self-regulation, civility, compassion and fairness).
- Students will be able to practice virtues and apply ethical principles to address problems that professionals encounter in print, broadcast and online journalism, and in other media work.

Course methods

- Examine ethical theories and frameworks that provide a foundation for ethical work life and decision-making in journalism and mass communication.
- Explore key issues in media ethics such as conflict of interest, reporter-source relationships, privacy, deception and challenges of portraying diverse voices.
- Wrestle with cases from journalism and other fields by applying relevant virtues, principles and decision-making frameworks.
- Learn from the lives and work of excellent professionals who live through ethical challenges day after day (through cases, guest speakers and individual interviewing).

Grading

50 points (25 each): virtue reflections

After the third session of class, in which I will talk about virtues and journalism, you will

write a short reflection on the relevance of the nine virtues we are covering to journalism. You will write a similar reflection during class on the last day.

150 points: short essay

You will write four to five pages on how an ethical theory or decision-making framework is relevant to an ethical case (for this assignment, a news media case we have not covered in class). I will provide a list of suggested resources.

250 (300 points for graduate students): media exemplar interview and analysis, presentation

You will identify a professional in journalism, advertising, PR or another media field known (locally or nationally) for good, ethical work and interview that person to explore what motivates him or her and how he or she has addressed specific ethical challenges in work life. Undergraduate students will write an eight-to 10-page paper (plus references) synthesizing key points on these issues from the interview, supported by quotations, and relating what you've heard to the nine virtues we have covered in class, considering how these virtues were evident or implied in the person's work or talk about that work. The paper should conclude with implications for your own professional work life, including what you have learned about the value of the virtues that relate to what you heard in the interview.

Graduate students will do a 15- to 18-page page paper (plus references) including a literature review of other media and professional ethics scholarship beyond what we have discussed in class.

Both undergraduate and graduate students will do a class presentation during the final two weeks of the semester on their findings from the paper. The presentation will be worth 50 points out of the total 250/300 points for the assignment.

150 points: in-class midterm

This will include questions about the nature and value of ethical theories and frameworks we have discussed, along with cases in which you will apply these perspectives. The test will include the nine virtues we have covered in class.

200 points (150 points for grad students): in-class final

Again this will include questions about theories and frameworks, as well as application of these to cases. This will be cumulative from the start of the semester. Again the test will include the nine virtues we have covered in class.

200 points: participation and attendance

Lively, thoughtful discussion will be crucial to your learning in this course -- and your enjoyment of it. That means I expect you read the assigned material before class, think about it and be prepared to discuss it in class.

The participation component of the class grade includes three elements:

Dilemma of the day (50 points total – 25 points each). You will sign up for two days during the semester in which you will provide a current example of something involving a question of media ethics. This could come from a variety of sources including stories you know about from your media consumption or your own work, or articles or social

media posts about controversial coverage. You must share material at the start of class in some form – such as a video clip, link or printout/copy – and be ready with three discussion questions for the class. This does not have to be related to the topic of the day. At least one of your discussion questions must relate the case to virtue ethics or another ethical theory or framework.

Leading of case discussion (50 points total – 25 points each). You will sign up for two days during the semester in which you will lead discussion on one of the textbook ethics cases assigned for the day in the syllabus. You must prepare discussion material in some form beforehand – such as a handout or PowerPoint slide – including three questions for discussion. At least one of your discussion questions must relate the case to virtue ethics or another ethical theory or framework.

Discussion participation (100 points). Class discussion will include, among other things: identification of relevant virtues, practice of them in case discussions and role-playing, application of other ethical frameworks in case discussions, and debriefing on guest speaker visits, particularly in connection with relevant virtues. I will expect you to participate regularly in class discussions and in small breakout groups that I will set up some days. Your grade for discussion participation will be based on my observation of your participation at both levels during the semester as a whole.

This course is professionally important, and I view your attendance as an expression of your own professionalism. **You may miss four class periods for any reason without penalty. If you miss any additional class periods, however, you will lose 200 points from your course grade unless you have a documented illness or personal emergency.**

Note: In keeping with stated university policy, an exception will be made for religious holidays. They will not count toward the absence limit if you notify me in advance in writing. (“It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays.” — Section 3.13.2, OU Faculty Handbook)

Aside from the case of religious holidays, test makeups and late assignments will be permitted only because of serious illnesses or emergencies.

Academic honesty

“Honesty is fundamental in all academic activities, and those privileged to be members of a university community have a special obligation to observe the highest standards of honesty and a right to expect the same standards of all others.” – OU Faculty Handbook.

According to the OU policy on academic misconduct, misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication and fraud. Cheating is “the use of unauthorized materials, methods, or information in any academic exercise, including improper collaboration.” Plagiarism is “the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own.” Fabrication is “the falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.” Fraud is “the falsification, forgery, or misrepresentation of academic work, including the resubmission of work performed for one class for credit in another class without the informed permission of the

second instructor....”

I take academic misconduct very seriously. You will be subject to the university’s academic misconduct policy.

If you have any questions during the semester about proper citation of words or ideas, please ask me.

Use of electronic devices during exams will not be permitted.

Diversity

Sensitivity to the diversity of our society is part of doing media work ethically. At several points in this course, we will explore how journalists and other media professionals can better serve all segments of society.

Disability statement

If any member of the class feels that he/she has a disability and needs special accommodations of any nature, I will work with you and the Office of Disabled Student Services to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to perform in the class. Please advise me of such disability and the desired accommodations at some point before, during or immediately after the first scheduled class period.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to adjustment, but I will let you know about any changes. And if issues in the news warrant it, we'll make time to discuss them.

Reading assignments are listed under the topics for each class session. For some topics, I will present additional ethics cases in class that will not require advance reading.

[DATES ARE FROM FALL 2015, WOULD BE ADJUSTED]

Week 1:

Tuesday, August 25

Introduction to the course

Thursday, August 27

Theories and frameworks for ethical decision-making Part 1

Plaisance, Chapters 1 and 2

Patterson & Wilkins, Chapter 1

Week 2:

Tuesday, September 1

Theories and frameworks for ethical decision-making Part 2

Selections from Aristotle in Theodore C. Denise, Sheldon P. Peterfreund, Nicholas P. White, eds., *Great Traditions in Ethics*, 9th ed., 149-165 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth).

David A. Craig, "An Ethical Lens for Looking at Excellence," in *Excellence in Online Journalism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 13-24.

Overview of nine key virtues on website of the OU Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing, <http://www.ou.edu/content/flourish/virtues.html>

Economic pressures on journalists

Patterson & Wilkins, pages 160-73 and Cases 7-C, E and F

Thursday, September 3

[FIRST DILEMMA OF THE DAY AND STUDENT-LED CASE DISCUSSION]

FIRST VIRTUE REFLECTION DUE

Independence and conflicts of interest (news and PR)

Plaisance, Chapter 8, Autonomy

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 4-A, C, D and G

Week 3:

Tuesday, September 8

Reporters and sources—ethics of interviewing, relationships with sources, engagement on social media

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 2-A, C and 10-B

Thursday, September 10

Reporters and sources, continued

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 2-E and F

Guest speaker (TBA)

Week 4:

Tuesday, September 15

Follow-up discussion on guest speaker: virtues in action

Big ideas under debate: truth, objectivity, transparency and verification – Day 1

Patterson & Wilkins, pages 21-31

Plaisance, Chapter 5, Transparency

Patterson & Wilkins, Case 2-B

Thursday, September 17

Big ideas under debate: truth, objectivity, transparency and verification – Day 2

Seth Mnookin and Hong Qu, "Organize the Noise: Tweeting Live from the Boston Manhunt," *Nieman Reports*, Spring 2013,

<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102885/Organize-the-Noise-Tweeting-Live-from-the-Boston-Manhunt.aspx>

Craig Silverman, "A New Age for Truth," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2012,
<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102762/A-New-Age-for-Truth.aspx>

David Turner, "Inside the BBC's Verification Hub," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2012,
<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102764/Inside-the-BBCs-Verification-Hub.aspx>

David Turner, "Vetting Information," *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2012,
<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102765/Vetting-Information.aspx>

Week 5:

Tuesday, September 22

Ethical choices in writing and editing

Thursday, September 24

SHORT ESSAY DUE

Watch/discuss content from Online News Association conference

Week 6:

Tuesday, September 29

The role of bias in political journalism and other news coverage

Place of the Fourth and Fifth estates

Issues versus horse race and tactics in political coverage

Craig, "Word Choice, Labeling, and Bias," in *The Ethics of the Story*, to be distributed

Readings TBA

Thursday, October 1

Truth and deception in newsgathering

Patterson & Wilkins, Case 6-F
Guest speaker (TBA)

Week 7:

Tuesday, October 6

Follow-up discussion on guest speaker: virtues in action
Truth and falsity in words and images (news)

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 8-D and H, 9-A and B and 4-C
Review for midterm

Thursday, October 8
MIDTERM

Week 8:

Tuesday, October 13

Truth and falsity in words and images (news and advertising)
Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 6-A, 3B, C and F

Thursday, October 15

Truth and falsity in words and images (PR)
Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 3-D and 9-G

Week 9:

Tuesday, October 20

Truth and falsity in words and images (art and entertainment)
Patterson & Wilkins, pages 254-68 and Case 10-A, G

Thursday, October 22

Ethics of data journalism
Readings TBA

Week 10:

Tuesday, October 27

Covering diverse voices: challenges in news, opinion and discussion

Guest speaker (TBA)

Plaisance, Chapter 10, Community
Steven Waldman, "The (Still) Evolving Relationship between *News* and *Community*," in
Kelly McBride and Tom Rosenstiel, editors, *The New Ethics of Journalism* (CQ Press, 2014),
167-76, to be posted on D2L

Thursday, October 29

Follow-up discussion on guest speaker: virtues in action

Privacy: personal pain versus public interest

Plaisance, Chapter 9, Privacy

Patterson & Wilkins, pages 108-21 and Cases 5-A, B and C, 8-A, 10-E

Compassion: journalists as human beings

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 8B, 8E

Week 11:

Tuesday, November 3

Privacy and compassion, continuing Thursday's discussion

Errors and accountability

Patterson & Wilkins, Case 2-D

Thursday, November 5

Social responsibility and national security

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 6-B, C, E

Week 12:

Tuesday, November 10

Social responsibility and justice

Plaisance, Chapter 6, Justice

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 6-D, 8-C, G

Thursday, November 12

More on social responsibility (news)

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 8-F, I

Guest speaker (TBA)

Week 13:

Tuesday, November 17

Follow-up discussion on guest speaker: virtues in action

Social responsibility (PR and advertising)

Plaisance, Chapter 7, Harm

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 3-E, F, H, 9-F

Thursday, November 19

MEDIA EXEMPLAR ANALYSIS DUE

Social responsibility (art and entertainment)

Patterson & Wilkins, Cases 10-D, F

Week 14:

Tuesday, November 24

Ethics and excellence

Class presentations on media exemplar interviews

Thursday, November 26

NO CLASS: Thanksgiving

Week 15:

Tuesday, December 1

Ethics and excellence

Class presentations on media exemplar interviews

Thursday, December 3

Ethics and excellence

Class presentations on media exemplar interviews

Week 16:

Tuesday, December 8

Ethics and excellence

Class presentations on media exemplar interviews

Survey on student growth during course (not graded)

Thursday, December 10

Ethics and excellence

Class presentations on media exemplar interviews

Writing of second short reflection on virtues and journalism

Wrap up and review

*******WEDNESDAY, DEC. 16, 4:30-6:30 P.M.: FINAL EXAM*******