

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO
ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION 215-201
SPRING SEMESTER 2017
SOC 010 MWF 2:45-3:35

Instructor: Randy Minkoff, rminkoff@luc.edu

Form of communication: Email is preferred and checked regularly

Course overview: The journalism profession faces ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Controversy itself is nothing new; humankind has been grappling with right and wrong since the beginning of time. But the methods in which the information is imparted are not always clear cut. Today's reporters, editors, producers, news directors and other decision makers face continuous challenges on how to gather the facts, how to determine the legitimacy of sources, and how to produce and write the stories, while making certain they are adhering to their outlet's own internal rules and regulations. Sometimes the reporters themselves become the story—for better or worse—and must address the ensuing consequences. Companies and organizations face the challenge of protecting themselves in crises and communicating in an honest manner, both internally and externally. Performers and entertainers face the challenge of being ostracized or possible censorship. The legitimacy of social media continues to have a major impact and has posed even more challenges. We will investigate the growing problem of “fake news” and its impact on both journalism and the public. The bottom line in today's world: Public vs. private no longer exists and everything is on the record.

Course specifics: We will examine newsworthy issues from the past and present and determine what can be learned from how they were handled (or in many cases mishandled.) You are strongly encouraged to be aware of contemporary events, bring examples to class, and actively participate in all discussions. In addition, there will be relevant videos and appropriate case studies. There will be several written assignments that I will go over in detail during the semester that will take several different forms. There will also be group presentations and final paper, which will be combined as your final exam.

Important FYI: While we will cover all of the topics on the schedule, there will be always be news, and events on any given day may take precedence. When that happens, we will take the time for discussion and may postpone the topic at hand. This will be somewhat free-flowing in nature, keeping in mind that we are talking about the news of the day and the opportunities for instant analysis in ‘real world real time’ scenarios.

Special note: *You are required to purchase a copy of the latest AP Stylebook so that required assignments are in the proper form. It is imperative you have access to keep track of daily newspapers, blogs, news websites as well as radio and television newscasts.*

Attendance: If you absolutely cannot attend class, you must let me know *immediately*. Because class discussions are a vital part of the course, I will regularly assess class participation as part of your grade. I will make sure ahead of time that you are made aware of the assignments and when they are due. You must turn in ALL assignments on time, even if you are unable to attend class for a specific reason. All assignments, power points and videos will only be presented in class so it is imperative you attend. If you have an excused absence, it is your responsibility to obtain all material covered from a classmate as it will be in 'real time' and not posted on line.

Grades: For most assignments you will receive a letter grade: A (excellent), B (very good), C (average), D (poor), F (automatic for any incomplete assignment.) Your overall grade is based on many factors: attendance, active participation in discussions, creativity and thoughtfulness on all written assignments. I place a very high level on in-class participation and weigh heavily toward that in determining a final grade.

In some isolated cases you will receive a 'complete' for an assignment; I will be very clear up front about grade expectations during each project. You will receive each grade in a timely fashion. The combined final exam will be more heavily weighted.

Additionally:

--Be on time. Lateness will not be tolerated. Be respectful of your professor and your classmates.

--Complete all assignments on time. No exceptions. If assignments are to be e-mailed, they MUST be by the time prescribed. Other assignments MUST be turned in at the start of class.

--Be original. Be ethical (remember the title of the class!), be honest with me and in your work. Always. Plagiarism is a serious offense and there will be consequences.

--Don't ever hesitate to ask for clarification or direction *before*— not *after* — the assignment is due...

--Be aware of what's going on in the world and be prepared to participate in all discussions.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Week of Jan. 18-20 Introduction & overview: Modern day ethics in the United States

- The state of journalism today, why Codes of Ethics exist. How ethics have evolved – and in some cases, not evolved – through American history.
- The First Amendment and “Truthiness”
- The Trump inauguration.
- Contemporary stories & discussion (ongoing weekly)

Week of Jan. 23-27: The presidential election/future of Trump administration

- Was the election a study in democracy or unethical behavior?
- Will the rift between the Trump Administration and media lead to more ‘questionable’ acts?
- How much does traditional media still matter in the age of social media(including its use by the administration?)

Week of Jan. 30-Feb. 3: A brief history of ethics in Journalism.

- A brief and somewhat revisionist history, why it still matters today
- Information imparted: from the Town Crier to faux news
- Journalism’s own scandals.
- What is permissible today would have not been allowed in previous generations.

Week of Feb, 6-10: The rise of fake news, its effect on social and traditional media.

- Is it a temporary problem or one that will continue to grow?
- Responsibility of journalists to deal with the issue
- Is it harmful or are is the public over-reacting?

Week of Feb. 13-17: The legacy of Watergate

- The legacy of Ben Bradlee and The Washington Post
- The Pentagon Papers, Watergate, & Janet Cooke
- The pressure to get information out too quickly at the sacrifice of accuracy & ethics.

Week of Feb. 20-24th: Watergate is *The Watershed*

- “All the President’s Men” viewing and in-class quiz

Week of Feb. 27-March 3: MIDTERMS

March 6-12: Spring Break, no classes

Week of March 13-17: Censorship/regulatory issues of journalism

- Is government regulation still needed in the world of the internet.
- Is it fair to regulate over-the-air television but not cable/streaming services?
- The power of the FCC & censorship, from George Carlin to Howard Stern

Week of March 20-24: Do we believe what we see? Entertainment vs actual competition

- From the \$64,000 Question to “The Voice” and “Dancing with the Stars.”
- Screening of the PBS documentary on the Quiz Show scandals
- Does the mainstream media pay too much attention to what happens in entertainment at the expense of “real news?”

Week of March 27-31: Journalists and celebrities--Blurred Lines

- Should reporters ever be anything but ‘journalists’?
- Crossing the line, what is acceptable to the public and the profession itself?

Week of April 3-7: Sports and big money--ethical problems through the years.

- Should reporters ever be ‘fans’?
- Public relations vs actual reporting.
- Athletes bypassing the media to reach the public

Week of April 10-12: Advertising--when does it go over the line?

- When do ads and ad campaigns cross ethical barriers?
- Regulation: Should there be more, or is it up to the public to decide real vs. ‘fake’?

April 14 & 17: Easter break, no classes

Week of April 19-21: “Off the record”, leaks

- Is everything ‘on the record in the digital age?
- Is Wikileaks the wave of the future or does it cross the line?
- What is the journalist’s responsibility to print or air, or to ignore?

Week of April 26-28: Review for final

Possible “Jeopardy!” game for teams to go over semester material & prepare for final.

Week of April 30-May 5: Final exam and finals paper.