

CCJN 2302
Ethics of Convergent Media
Spring 2011, Umphrey Lee Center No. 241

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An Overview of CCJN 2302

Perhaps no greater challenge exists to media in general than that posed by ethics. The basic issues of fairness and bias are, of course, at the heart of this question. But in recent years a whole range of complexities has been added to the mix of the discussion of ethics. From hidden cameras to the handling of sources, both identified and anonymous, as well as the issues of corporate ownership and the huge media conglomerates, the issues are difficult and can directly affect credibility as well as the public's general perception of media. This course will examine all these issues and more.

Learning objectives

In CCJN 2302, students will:

- Begin to learn the critical thinking skills necessary for ethical and effective communications.
- Develop a definitive cognitive process for recognizing and handling ethical decision-making.
- Become familiar with the major models used in ethical decision-making in communications and other professional disciplines.
- Learn some of the difficulties that have come about in communications from the business and journalism trends in converging media technologies and media companies.
- Study and analyze a number of major ethical lapses by media companies and individual journalists in recent years and understand more clearly how these failures have impacted media credibility.
- Learn the basic ethical criteria for the production of professional media content of the highest integrity.
- Understand the basic press theories, including their history and current applications, with particular emphasis on the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press.

Readings

The text for the class is *Media Ethics, Issues and Cases*, by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, 7th Edition. Immediately read the Foreword and Chapters 1, 2 and 11. These chapters are background for our initial discussions on ethics foundations. Don't read

these sections casually. You will be expected to know this material in detail, and the issues discussed form the basis of everything that will follow. Chapter readings are noted on the days of various lectures on the schedule below. Read the chapters before coming to class on that day. The lecture will make a lot more sense. There will be other supplemental readings posted on Blackboard.

Requirements

There will be three exams. The first two are spaced during the semester. Each of the first two exams is worth 15 percent of your grade. There will be three short quizzes, each worth 10 percent of your grade. There will be a writing assignment that also is worth 10 percent of your grade. Details are below. The final exam is worth 20 percent of your grade. Attendance is the final 10 percent of your grade. Details below. You are also expected to read a major newspaper daily (I recommend *The New York Times* or *The Dallas Morning News*) and to watch at least one major broadcast news production daily. Current events will be discussed daily and will be a part of the exams.

Procedure for Quizzes and Exams

The quizzes will be given on days listed on the class schedule. On these days, the quizzes will go online on Blackboard at 8 a.m. and go offline at 11:59 p.m. You may take the quiz at any time during this time window. You may use notes, books, Internet, or whatever you feel will help you. The quizzes are timed, and you will have 20 minutes to complete each quiz. (I will give you a short practice quiz before to make sure you are familiar with the process.) The first two exams and the final are given in class. The first two exams are on Blackboard. The final exam is on paper and on computer scan answer sheets. The first two exams are a combination of objective questions, short answer and usually one major essay question. The final exam, given only at the scheduled time, will be 100 objective questions for which you will use a computer scan answer sheet. (By university policy, I have only 48 hours after the final exam to post final grades, so I can't grade papers from a class of this size in that time.) Please note that since the final is an objective test, you will not be permitted to use notes, slides or your book. All quizzes and the final exam are cumulative. I can guarantee that material from the first lectures will be on the final exam. Material from any point in the semester can show up on any of the quizzes.

Attendance

If you come to class every day, you're probably going to do well in this class. I won't check roll. But I will frequently give pop quizzes at the end of class. Or sometimes at the beginning of class. I'll give a number of them, and most will have one question. If you've been coming to class, chances are you will answer the question correctly. At the end of the semester, I'll let you drop your two lowest pop quiz grades. I'll give you an average that will be the final 10 percent of your grade. If you come to class, you'll likely get the full 10 percent credit, which will usually make a letter grade difference in your final grade. The SMU Health Center has a specific policy on giving forms for excused

absences. Basically, the Health Center doesn't do it. The Health Center's policy is found at <http://smu.edu/healthcenter/policy/absenceclass.asp>. Since I am allowing you to drop two grades on the pop quizzes, the only way I will excuse an absence is with a physician's statement. If you consult a physician for an illness and receive specific certification for a recovery time, absences will be excused if I am given a form from the physician's office. It is your responsibility and yours alone to communicate with me on attendance and securing an excused absence.

William O'Neil Lecture in Business Journalism

Mark Miller, managing editor of The Texas Tribune, will deliver the William O'Neil Lecture in Business Journalism during the semester. The lecture will be Monday, Feb. 28 at 4 p.m. in Crum Auditorium in the Collins Executive Center. Your assignment is to write a 500-word report (no more than two pages, double-spaced) on the lecture. If you are familiar with news writing, write a news story. If not, write any type of a report that summarizes the lecture. Some students in the past have simply written a memo or letter to me about the lecture. Whatever the form you take, you must demonstrate college-level writing. There should be no run-on sentences or errors of grammar or fact and certainly no dangling modifiers. And I hate papers that do not observe proper pronoun-antecedent agreement. The report should be complete and communicate simply and in a straightforward manner what Miller says and does. This is a 10-point assignment, like the quizzes. Grades of 9 or 10 will only be given those papers that meet a high standard of writing. The papers are due in my office Wednesday, March 2, at noon. The papers must be in hard copy. Don't email it to me. Don't bother turning in anything late. If it's not there by deadline, the grade is a zero. If for any reason you have a conflict and cannot make this lecture, let me know immediately so that we can schedule an alternate writing assignment.

Grades

On Blackboard you will be able to see your weighted grade after the first quiz. You'll be able to follow the weighted total throughout the semester. Final grades will be as follows: 93 percent and above, A; 92 percent to 90 percent, A minus; 89 to 87, B plus; 86 to 83, B; 82 to 80, B minus; 79 to 77, C plus; 76 to 73, C; 72 to 70, C minus; 69 to 65, D; 64 or below, F. I don't grade on a curve, so there is no predetermined number of As, Bs, etc. If you have a 95 average, you make an A, irrespective of how many other students in the class make an A.

SMU Honor Code

Honesty and intellectual integrity are at the heart of the learning process as well as any profession for which you may prepare and ultimately decide to pursue. It is your responsibility to read and understand the SMU Honor Code. Please note that the code calls upon students who are aware of academic dishonesty to report such matters to the instructor. Violations of the code will be dealt with in the prescribed manner.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) at 214-768-1470 or www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp <<http://www.smu.edu/alec/dass.asp>> to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4; an attachment describes the DASS procedures and relocated office.)

Religious Observances

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify the instructor in writing at the beginning of the semester and should discuss, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

University Extracurricular Activities

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled university extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work.

Class schedule

Below is a schedule. It is only tentative because there must be flexibility to discuss and examine any issue in the news. We will switch dates for certain lectures or eliminate some entirely to accommodate discussion of important news events that relate to the mass media. Class will frequently begin with a brief discussion of the news events of the day. It is quite likely that some of these discussions will be used for some of the questions on the exams.

Tuesday, Jan. 18: An introduction to the class and explanation of expectations and grading. We begin with an introduction to the issue of converging media companies, critical thinking and understanding of what ethics is and is not.

Thursday, Jan. 20: In preparation for this class, please read Plato's *Crito* (posted on Blackboard). We will examine a series of questions to understand a basic definition of justice and begin to apply this knowledge to communications.

Tuesday, Jan. 25: An introduction to ethics models and an extended discussion of John Rawls' theory of fairness and the history and usefulness of the Potter Box. *Media Ethics* Chapter 4.

Thursday, Jan. 27: An overview of press freedom theories. How we came by the Social Responsibility Theory of the press and what it means for the 21st Century media. *Media Ethics* Chapter 6.

- Tuesday, Feb. 1:** Codes of ethics of various professional journalism and advertising groups. (Posted on Blackboard.) They're numerous and contain lots of good ideas for communications. What exactly is independence in reporting? And why don't these codes seem to work? Privacy, what it is and who's entitled to it (and who isn't). *Media Ethics* Chapter 5. **First Quiz to be taken in class.**
- Thursday, Feb. 3:** Privacy and politics. Is there a line? Beyond Clinton and Lewinsky; JFK and Marilyn.
- Tuesday, Feb. 8:** The case of Richard Jewell, the man originally thought to be a suspect in the Olympic Park bombing in 1996. Jewell said the media essentially destroyed his life, and many agree with him. Are there lessons to be learned?
- Thursday, Feb. 10:** Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass and other rogues of journalism: A review of some of the worst cases of media plagiarism and fabrication and the damage it has done to credibility.
- Tuesday, Feb. 15 and Thursday, Feb. 17:** Hidden cameras. We examine the use of hidden cameras in broadcast journalism investigations. We examine in detail the highly publicized Food Lion case in which ABC News was sued. Deception in journalism has a rather long history. We'll review some noted cases and examine the justification model by Sissela Bok.
- Tuesday, Feb. 22: First Exam.**
- Thursday, Feb. 24:** Media convergence. The business issues. *Media Ethics* pages 209-236.
- Tuesday, March 1:** Media convergence. The content issues. The real ethics issue today in media: money. Diversity and other issues of credibility.
- Thursday, March 3:** Celebrity news, infotainment, Britney and Lindsay. *Media Ethics* Chapter 10.
- Tuesday, March 8:** Grief journalism. Guest lecturer: Pam Hackett, Division of Journalism at SMU.
- Thursday, March 10:** Guest lecturer: Nick Lemann, dean, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. **Second quiz online from 8 a.m. until 11:59 p.m.**
- March 12-20: Spring Break.**
- Tuesday, March 22:** Advertising. *Media Ethics* Chapter 3.
- Thursday, March 24:** Advertising and the separation of church and state. Which is which? The real ethics issue in media today? Money. *Media Ethics* Chapter 7.
- Tuesday, March 29:** Covering war and embedded journalists. A brief look at the history of war coverage and the performance of the embedded journalists covering the war in Iraq.
- Thursday, March 31:** Decency, the FCC and the Janet Jackson topless act at the Super Bowl. (Yes, I'll show the slides.)
- Tuesday, April 5: Second exam.**
- Thursday, April 7:** The Dan Rather controversy over the National Guard documents. Does telling the truth count?
- Tuesday, April 12:** The blogosphere and its implications. USAgonedirty.com, text messaging and other nuances of the Information Age. *Media Ethics* Chapter 9.

Thursday, April 14: Violence and the media. Is a shameless pursuit of ratings and audience always right? So, what exactly is a conflict of interest? Elephants and the circus. **Third quiz online from 8 a.m. until 11:59 p.m.**

Tuesday, April 19: Reporter privilege. Judith Miller and other cases. When a promise means going to jail.

Thursday, April 21: Photojournalism. A need for even more sensitivity. *Media Ethics* Chapter 8.

Tuesday, April 26: Rupert Murdoch and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Thursday, April 28: A few final thoughts on fairness and bias, and what to expect on ethics in the modern workplace. What would Kant or Plato say about where we are today?

Thursday, May 5, 8 a.m.-11 a.m.: Final exam. **This is the only time the final exam will be offered.**