

JOUR 501 Freedom, Responsibility and Ethics

Spring, 2012
Tue/Thur, 12:30-1:45 p.m.
Coliseum 3007

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Course description:

As society has become more complicated, the role of the media has never been more important. We depend upon the mass media for news and information as well as context and perspective. The media interpret and sometimes even define the national agenda. So it is not surprising that their decisions attract so much scrutiny. This course will challenge students to analyze, evaluate and better understand the role and responsibility of the media from an ethical perspective. The course will examine issues like:

- The relevance of race to media decision-making.
- The continuing debate over revealing private facts about public figures.
- The role of honesty and fairness in public relations and advertising.

While the course primarily focuses on issues in journalism, it will be relevant to advertising and PR practitioners as well as news consumers.

Recommended text:

Controversies in media ethics by A. David Gordon & John Michael Kittross. Longman. ISBN 0-8013-3025-4

Graduate students will be required to read a supplemental text: ETHICS Discovering Right & Wrong by Louis P. Pojman. Thomson Wadsworth. ISBN 0534619363

Course of study:

When it comes to media ethics, one quickly learns there seldom are "easy answers." Good decisions stem from a sense of guiding principles as well as healthy discussion. The textbook, which is out of print, is not required, but rather it supplements class lectures, videotapes and material posted on the University's Blackboard Internet site. Using real world scenarios, students will be placed in the role of media decision-makers, writing essays on how they would handle stories or issues and why.

Grading:

Your final grade in this course will be based upon several factors: There will be four essays, each worth 10 percent of your grade. There will be three media audits, each worth 10 percent of your grade. Five percent of your grade will be based upon class participation. The final exam will account for 25 percent of your grade. Students who achieve As on all of their essays and individual media audits will be exempt from the final.

Attendance will be taken. As per University policy, any student with more than three unexcused absences (10 percent of the classes) will lose a full letter grade for the course. Any student with more than six unexcused absences will not be able to pass the course.

The final will be based upon the text as well as material presented in class by the professor and guest lecturers. Essays will be graded on the basis of clarity of writing and thought, research and

the ability to identify and evaluate the most important issues and considerations for the assigned topic. From time to time, there will be an opportunity to do work for extra credit and students wishing to improve their grade may do extra credit work with approval from the instructor. Graduate students must write a final paper on a subject to be approved in advance by the instructor, utilizing ethical principles derived from the supplemental text.

Website:

Assignments and other relevant class information will be posted on the University's Blackboard website.

Office hours:

As Director of Newsplex, which is located at South Carolina ETV, I do not have an office in the Coliseum. However, I am available to meet students after class or by appointment. If you have questions or problems, E Mail to the address above usually is the easiest way to reach me.

Final thoughts:

This is a class that emphasizes critical thinking. Over the semester, you will wrestle with issues of fairness, racial sensitivity and media bias. As with most things in life, you will get as much out of this class as you put into it. So come to class, concentrate on your writing and don't hesitate to get involved in class discussions.