Ethics in the Media

Course Details
Course Designator & Number: DBLN 3019
Number of Credits: 3
Language of Instruction: English
Contact Hours: 45
Instructor: On-site Faculty

Course Description
This course will address the principal ethical issues facing journalism, advertising, entertainment media, and online content. It will examine the moral obligations of the producers as well as the responsibilities borne by consumers. The course will provide an overview of the applicable ethical principles and philosophies, then apply these to present-day cases in the media through case studies. Finally, students will learn to critically engage with the content to analyse for themselves the ethical issues that are present in the production and consumption of the media on an individual and societal level.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, students should be to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the historical and current ethical issues facing the media industry
- Insight into editorial decision-making and regulatory standards of media producers
- Comprehension of the institutional, societal, and individual pressures that contribute to ethical decisions and lapses
- Understanding of the impact of ethical versus unethical behaviour on the part of the media as it relates to democracy, journalistic practice, and public trust
Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

A. Engage in critical thinking and evaluation;
B. Master a body of knowledge;
C. Communicate effectively both in writing and through oral presentations;
D. Understand the impact of globalization on the creation of media content and the ethical issues facing journalists in a global community;
E. Describe the similarities and differences between Irish, UK, and US cases;
F. Explain how political, institutional, corporate, and other societal structures influence media practices with specific regard to issues surrounding ethical practices

Developmental Outcomes

Students should demonstrate: responsibility and accountability, independence and interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, and appreciation of cultural differences.

Methodology

Lectures, discussions, weekly assignments, tests, student presentations, guest lectures, and out-of-class field visits.

Experiential Learning & Field Visits

CAPA provides the unique opportunity to learn about the city through direct, guided experience. Participation in field activities for this course is required. Students will actively explore the Global City in which they are currently living. Furthermore, they will have the chance to collect useful information that will be an invaluable resource for the essays/papers/projects assigned in this course.

The assigned field components are:

Griffith College Public Lecture: (there will be a make-up for those who cannot attend due to WORK-RELATED reasons only)

Required Reading / Materials


## Grading

### Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Score or Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93–100</td>
<td>Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90–92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83–86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80–82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
<td>Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73–76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70–72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67–69</td>
<td>Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60–66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–59</td>
<td>Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.</td>
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Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation/small group discussion</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall grade</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
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Assessment Details

Weekly Quizzes

Students will respond to questions about the assigned readings, lectures, and discussions. Responses will be graded out of 10 and will be graded on thoughtfulness, thoroughness, and validity. The overall writing assignment grade will be calculated as an average all writing assignment grades. Some writing assignments will be completed out of class.

Class Participation

Class participation, broadly defined, is the student’s willingness to answer instructor questions and participate in class discussions. Class participation is very important in this course and is worth 20% of the student’s final grade.

Oral Presentations

Each student will be required to make one in-class presentation. A schedule and further details on the presentations will be provided in the second week of course.
Midterm & Final Exam

The midterm will cover theoretical topics and readings from the first half of the course. The final is cumulative. The final will be graded out of 30 and be composed of numerous short essays (this is subject to change at the lecturer’s discretion).

Course Content

- All readings will be sent to students electronically as a PDF file
- Readings may be subject to change with advance notice.

Unit 1

Ethics in the Media
The influence of philosophy on the creation of democracy; the influence of religion on maintaining feudalism until the European and US revolutions of the 17th and 18th Centuries inspired by shifts in ethical thinking. Do we need to re-examine our ethical systems with the rise of behavioural economics and artificial intelligence?

Unit 2

Fake News & Alternative Facts
Truth-telling journalism provides our window to the world, when citizens do not have a first-hand account. But increasingly journalists are reliant on second-hand accounts from motivated sources and public relations. Are facts being presented or is democracy being undermined by half-truths and lies?

Unit 3

Private Companies, Capitalism, & the Marketplace
From corporate whistleblowers to Wikileaks; the wrongdoing of the powerful has been exposed to the media—or has escaped scrutiny until catastrophic failure [Enron, Lehman Brothers, Anglo-Irish Bank]. Irish media commentators failed to identify a property bubble before the economic crisis of 2008—was this oversight or a conflict of interests?

- Readings:
Unit 4

Unattributed Sources
What issues surround unattributed sources—and the protection of source identity. Journalists ought to be prepared to go to jail to protect their confidential sources; so how big a risk should journalists take to break the story? Who’s Using Whom? Entertainment features in the top five content providers for our print and broadcast news; but are celebrities so often the victims of media intrusion or responsible for an ethical shift as a result of shameless publicity seeking.

Unit 5

Privacy
Lady Diana Spencer was described in her brother’s eulogy as “the most hunted person of the modern age.” The media were also skeptical of her charity work—and this raises questions of motivation of anyone who publicly tries to do good [now termed “virtue signalling”]. How do journalists balance the public interest versus an interested public.

Unit 6

Midterm Exam

Unit 7

Individual Journalists & the Ethics of Practice: You Couldn’t Make It Up
But some journalists have—and they so nearly got away with it; from falsely declaring the breakout of war to inventing unattributed quotations. Why the truth reigns supreme in deciding what is real or imaginary, right or wrong, there are those who break societal values that underpin communication.

Unit 8

Moral Panic & Public Opinion
The construction of moral panics and the beneficiaries of these seismic shifts in public opinion: and the damaging impact of commercial and political influences on social freedoms. From increased insurance premiums to clampdowns of law and order to benefit politicians at the ballot box.
Unit 9

Crime & the Media
From underreporting to overreporting and the rise of the journalist as a participant. The changing nature of crime journalism in Ireland highlights a fraught and shifting relationship between journalists and police—including the glamorization of criminals and the dangers to reporters—but how does this impact on the watchdog role of the media?

● Readings:

Unit 10

Commercialization
How advertising bypasses the critical process of journalism and speaks directly to the consumer; but what are the ethical considerations for advertisers and are they followed? There will be case studies from the gambling industry—decoding the imagery presented to understand what the advertisers are selling.

Unit 11

Crossing the Line
Does the end justify the means? Examining where journalists break the rules in order to break the story. Kant says no; Bentham says yes—even Woodward and Bernstein crossed the line during Watergate by gaining access through contacts to telephone and credit card records; in a fiercely competitive profession, the temptations may prove too much.

Unit 12

Social Media Ethics
Unsocial media Is the rise of social media platforms re-engineering humanity into a profoundly different way of interacting with each other, and creating division and conflict to manufacture
consent? Does social media inherently encourage individuality and competition rather than community and cooperation? The regulators believe so but are lagging behind rapidly evolving algorithms.

**Unit 13**

**Censorship**
Irish media has experienced religious and political censorship in the 20th Century—from “evil literature,” Ireland’s neutral status in the Second World War and the lawful prohibition from broadcasting interviews with members of proscribed organisations. Media censorship has assumed greater relevance in the “war on terror”—but what are the ethical implications for democracy?

**Unit 14**

**In-Class Final**

**Policies**

**Attendance Policy**
Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

**University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures**

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

**Scholastic Dishonesty**
Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.
Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

**Student Conduct**

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.