



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-500-01: ETHICS

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS JOURNALISM

Wednesdays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Spring 2017

Associate Professor: Brooke Van Dam, Ph.D.

Downtown campus, Room C116

- Office hours are by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Journalists are confronted with ethical dilemmas on a routine basis that can challenge their personal and professional ideologies. This course explores the myriad of gray areas that dominate the way journalists work and live. It is designed to help students understand the ethical implications of the choices journalists make while empowering them to navigate the ever changing field.

This is a core course of the MPS Journalism program, and students must earn a “B” (83) or higher to pass the course. Please see the Graduate Student Handbook for more details.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

- Identify the basic tenants of journalism ethics and current ethical issues in the field
- Demonstrate ways to personally apply ethics in everyday news work
- Analyze major case studies of journalism ethics
- Relate the intersection of journalism ethics and media law

REQUIRED READING

Title: *The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century*

Author: Kelly McBride and Tom Rosenstiel

Publisher: CQ Press

Publication Year: 2013

ISBN: 978-1604265613

Price: \$34.54 (from Amazon)

Recommended readings and resources:



- [Society of Professional Journalists & SPJ Ethics Committee](#)
- [Digital Media Law Project Legal Guide](#), Harvard University
- [The Poynter Institute](#)
- [Columbia Journalism Review](#)
- [Digital Journalist's Legal Guide, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#)
- [Nieman Reports](#), Harvard University
- [Markkula Center for Applied Ethics](#), Santa Clara University
- [Center for Journalism Ethics](#), University of Wisconsin-Madison
- [Knight Case Studies Initiative](#), Columbia University
- [Ethics Cases Online](#), Indiana University School of Journalism
- [NPR Ombudsman & New York Times Public Editor](#)
- Jim Romenesko: <http://www.JimRomenesko.com>
- [Media Gazer](#)
- [Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism](#)
- [Pew Internet & American Life Project](#)
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ATTENDANCE

As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). **Absences for classes beyond the initial two will result in further reduction of the final grade.** If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

This class relies heavily on attendance and participation. Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

Instructional continuity: In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise noted. **Journalism requires a strict adherence to deadlines. Late papers will not be accepted.** If there is a potential conflict for an upcoming assignment, please let the professor know ahead of time and make arrangements



Weekly Ethics Summaries:

For eight weeks during the semester (starred in the syllabus), students will be required to bring to class an example of an ethical issue or question raised in the course of news coverage that week. It may be an example of poor or successful handling of an ethical component or it may be simply a story that leads to an additional question about journalism ethics.

Newseum:

Each student will also be required to write a two paragraph post on Canvas with a highlight from the field trip to the Newseum which illuminates an ethical issue.

Written Assignments:

There are three written assignments required for the course. More details will be given in class, but generally the assignments are as follows:

1. Students will write a 1200-1400 word paper, double-spaced in 12-point type: Analyze the ethics involved in a news story chosen by the student. The paper must include the following:
 - What is the ethical issue?
 - How did the news organization handle it?
 - Was it the right choice? Why? Students must be able to defend their response.
2. Students will interview four professional working journalists about how they approach four different ethical issues. They will then write a 1500-2000 word essay about their responses. The four areas include: speed vs. accuracy, sourcing, conflicts of interest, and the relationship with the audience/user

Final Project-Code of Ethics

The final project, will be a written code of ethics created by the student which will encompass all they have learned during the semester and pulls from the best ethic codes they have found from news organizations. The paper is due the final day of class where students will also present their Ethics Code to the class.

Unless otherwise noted, these three assignments should be filed by email to the instructor by the time class begins on the day the assignment is due. Please submit the papers as Word documents and attach them to your email.

Law Exam

There will also be one out of class law exam. For each, students will have a defined period of time to make demonstrate their understanding of media law as it relates to ethics.

Summary of assignments/tests and deadlines:



1. Weekly summaries of current ethical issues due in class
2. Case study analysis paper
3. Law Exam
4. Journalist Interview Essay
5. Final paper and presentation

GRADING

Your assignments will be graded on content and also the mechanics of writing. Your total course grade will be based on the following:

In-class participation:	5 percent
Weekly ethics summaries:	10 percent
Analytical paper:	15 percent
Journalist Interview Essay:	20 percent
Newseum:	5 percent
Law Exam:	15 percent
Final paper and presentation:	30 percent
Total:	100 percent

Students will receive information detailing the expectations for each assignment. Each assignment will get a numerical grade, 0 to 100, which will translate to the letter grades below. Final grades will be determined by multiplying the numerical grade by the percentage outlined above.

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.** The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a grade of a B- or below.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>



- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
202-687-6985
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.



SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The professor reserves the right to update the syllabus during the semester, especially as it pertains to the timing of guest speakers. In those instances, the professor will provide ample warning of any changes.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1, January 18th THE ETHICS OF TRUTH AND SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

We will discuss what it means to be a truth teller and what the role of the journalist is (or is not) in 21st Century America

Readings: Chapters 1-2 *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- [Walter Lippman *Public Opinion* Chapter 1](#)
- Carlin Romano, [“We Need ‘Philosophy of Journalism,’”](#) *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2009.

WEEK 2, January 25th ETHICAL THINKING and RESEARCH

We will discuss how journalists create boundaries within their profession. We will also begin a discussion about legal issues which will be explored later in the semester.

Special Guest: Megan Hunt, Head Library, Georgetown SCS

Readings:

- [“A Framework for Thinking Ethically”](#) and [“Ethical Decision Making,”](#) Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University.
- [“Ethics in a Nutshell,”](#) Center for Journalism Ethics, University of Wisconsin.
- [Code of Ethics](#) of the Society of Professional Journalists.
- NPR [Ethics Handbook](#).
- [AP ethics code](#)
- The Verge [Ethics Policy](#)

WEEK 3, February 1st SOURCING, ATTRIBUTION AND RUMORS*

We will discuss creating, building and trusting sources; how to deal with anonymous sources and rumors; and when to attribute information from your colleagues.

Readings: Chapter 9, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- [Woodward and Bernstein on Watergate](#)
Case Study: VA Rape in Rolling Stone
[Rolling Stone story “A Rape on Campus”](#):
- [Rolling Stone “Note to Readers”](#)
- [Washington Post on Rolling Stone rape story](#)
- [Being duped by sources](#)- A journalist’s confession
- Margaret Sullivan, [“The Disconnect on Anonymous Sources,”](#) *New York Times*, Oct. 2013.



- [“Racial bias and news media reporting: New research trends,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, 2015.

WEEK 4, February 8th CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND THE POLITICAL CLIMATE*

Case Study Analysis Due

This class will discuss issues of conflict that may arise for journalists during the reporting process. It also addresses the current political climate and how journalists should go about their job in a politically polarized environment.

Readings:

- Margaret Sullivan, [“Perfectly Reasonable Question: Quoting a Person or a Prepared Statement?”](#); [“Conflict of Interest in *T Magazine’s* Tech Article,”](#) *New York Times*, Aug./Oct. 2015.
- Ira Basen, [“Why Transparency Is Not Enough: The Case of Mr. Mike,”](#) Center for Journalism Ethics, University of Wisconsin, June 2011.
- [“Potential Conflicts of Interest,”](#) NYU Journalism Handbook for Students.
- [“Conflicted: The *New York Times* and the Bias Question,”](#) Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.
- Michael Hiltzik, [“Are Silicon Valley Tech Bloggers Truly Objective?”](#) *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 2012.
- [“Research chat: U.T. Austin’s Talia Stroud on how to de-polarize news audiences,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, Oct. 2014.
- [“Media bias, partisanship and what it means for democracy: Research chat and reading list,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, April 2014.
- Jim Rutenberg, [Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism,](#) *The New York Times*, Aug. 7, 2016

WEEK 5, February 15th RELATIONSHIP WITH AUDIENCE AND PRIVACY*

We will explore the often complicated relationship that journalists have with their audience. We will look at boundaries that need to be knocked down and others that may need to be created.

Readings: Chapter 11 and 14, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- Anne Johnson, [“Policing The Trolls: The Ins and Outs of Comment Moderation,”](#) NPR.org, Sept. 2015.
- Molly De Aguiar, [“Building News with Not Just For the Community,”](#) Nieman Journalism Lab, Dec. 2015.
- [The Case of Gawker v. Hulk Hogan:](#) *The New Yorker*
- Edward Schumacher-Matos, [“Changing Field: A New Guideline On What To Call That Washington Football Team,”](#) NPR.org, Oct. 2014.



- Al Tompkins, [“Where The Journal News went wrong in publishing names, addresses of gun owners,”](#) Poynter Institute, Jan. 2013.
- Nicholas Kristoff, [“Is It Ever O.K. to Name Rape Victims?”](#) *New York Times*, Feb. 2010.
- [“Privacy and the Public Interest: Frederick, MD, News-Post and the Bruce Ivins Story,”](#) Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.
- The sexual lives of politicians. [Should they have an expectation of privacy?](#)

WEEK 6, February 22nd THE LAW*

This class gives a brief survey of the laws that journalists work under. It will also explore some of the new digital landscape where the line between legal and illegal is blurred.

Readings:

- Majority and dissenting opinions in landmark First Amendment Supreme Court cases: *Near v. Minnesota* (1931); *Times v. Sullivan* (1964); *Branzburg v. Hayes* (1971); *New York Times v. United States* (1971).
- [“Publishing Information that Harms Another's Reputation,”](#) Digital Media Law Project, Harvard University.
- Jonathan Peters, [“A pair of lawsuits highlight libel law’s complexity,”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 2015.
- [The First Amendment Handbook](#), Reporter’s Committee for Freedom of the Press.
- [“Live-blogging and Tweeting from Court”](#); [“Publishing Information that Harms Another's Reputation”](#); [“Practical Tips for Handling Requests to Correct or Remove Material,”](#) Digital Media Law Project, Harvard University.
- Jonathan Peters, [“Can I Use That? A Legal Primer for Journalists,”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, Oct. 2015.

WEEK 7, March 1st SENSATIONALISM AND SPEED*

LAW EXAM (Taken during this week)

Special Guest: Judy Kurtz, The Hill

Two of the biggest moral dilemmas for journalists today are sensationalism and the constant need to be first. This class explores those two journalistic minefields and tried to help come to some ethical guidelines journalists can work under.

Readings: The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America- Daniel Boorstein

Chapter 3, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- Mark Follman, [“How the Media Inspires Mass Shooters,”](#) *Mother Jones*, Oct. 2015.
- [“Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals,”](#) World Health Organization, 2008.
- Edward Schumacher-Matos, [“Getting It Right: Sandy Hook And The Giffords Legacy At NPR,”](#) NPR.org, Jan. 2013.
- Brian Stetler, [“News Media and Social Media Become Part of a Real-Time Manhunt Drama,”](#) *New York Times*, April 2013.



- Jack Shafer, [“In Defense of Journalistic Error,”](#) Reuters, April 2013.
- Bill Grueskin, [“In Defense of Scoops,”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, April 2013.

WEEK 8, March 15th DEALING WITH DATA, POLLING AND HACKING*

Readings: Chapter 4 and 7, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- Alberto Cairo, [“Data Journalism Needs to Up Its Own Standards,”](#) Nieman Journalism Lab, July 2014.
- [“Data Journalism Ethics: Tricky Questions Buried in the Numbers,”](#) Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University.
- Margaret Sullivan, [“Times Magazine Editor on ‘Creative Apocalypse’ Article,”](#) *New York Times*, Sept. 2015.
- Seth C. Lewis, et al. [“Big Data and Journalism: Epistemology, Expertise, Economics and Ethics,”](#) *Digital Journalism*, 2015.

WEEK 9, March 22nd THE BUSINESS OF JOURNALISM*

Special Guest: Steve Johnson, Boundless

This class explores the line between advertising/marketing/PR/journalism. In today’s blurry job market what are the ethical barriers journalists should create between the different aspects of a news organization. Should there be more overlap? Less?

Readings: Chapter 6 and 8, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- Ira Basen, [“Breaking Down the Wall,”](#) Center for Journalism Ethics, University of Wisconsin, Dec. 2012.
- Dean Starkman, [“Bloomberg News and the problem of church-state separation,”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov. 2013.
- [“A Matter of Opinion: The Oregonian Editorial Board and Sam Adams,”](#) Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.
- Margaret Sullivan, [“As Print Fades, Part 1: ‘Live Journalism’ at The Times”;](#) [“As Print Fades, Part 3: Sponsorships and Start-ups,”](#) *New York Times*, Aug./Sept. 2015.
- [“Native advertising and sponsored content: Research on audience, ethics, effectiveness,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, Aug. 2015.
- *The Atlantic*: [“Advertising Guidelines.”](#)
- Jared Keller, [“The Atlantic, the Church of Scientology, and the Perils of Native Advertising,”](#) Bloomberg Business, Jan. 2013.
- [“Can Investigative Journalism Pay?: InvestigateWest and the Nonprofit Model,”](#) Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.

WEEK 10, March 29th PRESENTATION OF SELF

Special Class TBD



WEEK 11, April 5th PLAGIARISM, FABRICATION AND LIES*

This class tries to make meaning of the ultimate betrayal in journalism-lying. It explores high-profile cases where journalists have lied to their readers and talks through how the profession and individual should've handled the situation.

Journalist Interview Essay Due

Readings: Chapter 10, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- Charles Seife, ["Jonah Lehrer's Journalistic Misdeeds at Wired.com,"](#) Slate, Aug. 2012.
- David Uberti, ["Journalism Has a Plagiarism Problem, But It's Not the One You'd Expect,"](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov. 2014.
- Dan Barry, et al, ["Times Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception,"](#) *New York Times*, May 2003.
- Hanna Rosin, ["Hello, My Name is Stephen Glass, and I'm Sorry,"](#) *The New Republic*, Nov. 2014.
- Brian Williams: [NY Times](#) and [Vanity Fair](#)
- [Janet Cooke](#) Pulitzer story withdrawn
- [Jack Kelley fabrication at USA Today](#)

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WEEK 12, April 12th - NEWSEUM FIELD TRIP IN PLACE OF CLASS

WEEK 13, April 19th VIDEO AND PHOTO ETHICS

We will discuss our visit to the Newseum. This class will also explore ethical issues surrounding visual journalism.

Readings: Chapter 5, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- WGBH, ["Frontline Journalistic Guidelines,"](#) 2015.
- Liam Andrew, ["Controlled chaos: As journalism and documentary film converge in digital, what lessons can they share?"](#) Nieman Journalism Lab, Oct. 2014.
- ["Best practices for documentary filmmakers and journalistic video work: Research on risks, resources,"](#) *Journalist's Resource*, April 2015.
- ["Frontline's 'The Last Abortion Clinic': What's Fair in a Video World?"](#) Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia University.
- [Chicago Sun-Times Will Train Staffers](#) on iPhone Photography Basics: Poynter
- [Photographer accused of staging photo:](#) Petapixel
- The [New York Post defends](#) its decision to publish a photo of a man on the subway tracks about to be hit:
- [Rolling Stone cover](#) on Boston Marathon bombing suspect:



WEEK 14, April 26th SOCIAL MEDIA

We will explore how social media changes how journalists both gather and disseminate information.

Readings: Chapter 3, *The New Ethics of Journalism*

- [“Social Media,”](#) NPR Ethics Handbook.
- [“Social Media Guidelines for AP Reporters,”](#) Associated Press.
- [“What Audiences Think of Journalists’ Social Media Use,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, 2015.
- Jackie Spinner, [“On the ‘digital frontline,’ social media reporters and editors exposed to vicarious trauma,”](#) *Columbia Journalism Review*, Dec. 2015.
- Mark Little, [“What Social Verification Teaches about Trust”](#) (video), Markkula Center for Applied Ethics.
- Josh Stearns, [“How Verification Became a Community Service in Social Journalism,”](#) Media Shift Idea Lab, Nov. 2015.
- [“Social and news media, violent extremism, ISIS and online speech: Research review,”](#) Journalist’s Resource, March 2015.

FINAL, May 10th – PRESENTATIONS and ETHICS CODE DUE