

## Media Ethics

JRSM 4708/6708-001

Fall 2023

Class meeting: TR 9:40-11:05, MJ 112

Dr. David Arant

Office: 300 Meeman

Email: [darant@memphis.edu](mailto:darant@memphis.edu)

Phone: 901-678-2402

Office Hours: 1:30-3:30 p.m., Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and other times by appointment. As department chair, I attend many university meetings, so it's better to call ahead or book an appointment to make sure I'll be in the office. I am also available for phone or Zoom appointments.

### **Catalog Description**

Classical approaches to ethics presented with their application to the day-to-day considerations journalism, public relations and advertising professionals must face in working with employers, local publics and the larger society which depends on a free flow of accurate information.

### **Required Textbook**

Lee Wilkins, Chad Painter and Philip Patterson, Media Ethics: Issues and Cases, Rowman and Littlefield, 10th edition, 2022, ISBN 978-1-5381-4237-0. The textbook will be supplemented by articles linked through the online syllabus on the Canvas course site.

### **Classroom format**

The class will be presented in both the lecture and discussion formats as well as include student case study presentations. Class discussion will involve application of ethical principles to the dilemmas facing media practitioners in their professional practice. Assignments will require students to analyze cases and apply appropriate ethical principles.

### **Course objectives**

How do news journalists or advertisers, public relations and visual media professionals decide the right thing to do? In this course, you will learn how to analyze ethical dilemmas you will face in your media practice. First, you will learn foundational principles of moral philosophy. Then, you will use those principles to analyze ethical dilemmas faced by media professionals. In particular, you will analyze ethical dilemmas that journalists face in gathering and disseminating news and that public relations, advertising and visual media professionals face in communicating with their multiple publics. Objectives of this course also include increased tolerance for differences of opinion, greater appreciation and respect for racial, ethnic and gender diversity, and heightened sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of your professional practice.

The purpose of the course is to teach you how to weigh the values and demands implicit in your media practice over against the values that underlie society. The class also asks you to consider your life's work in the context of the societal good. You are asked to examine your own personal

values and test how those values play out in your professional practice. Each student will develop his or her own code of professional media practice, including guidelines for the use of the new AI-content generators.

Media practitioners must make ethical decisions every day in their workplace. Reporting news online and in social media presents ethical and legal questions for professional journalists as well as for citizen journalists. As journalists have moved from reporting news in traditional broadcast and print media to posting and promoting news through social media, have the ethical standards for journalists changed and, if so, how? The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok for communicating with and developing community with publics presents ethical and legal concerns for professional strategic communicators. Public relations and advertising practitioners use of social media and more traditional channels to engage their audiences often gives rise to issues of transparency about the source of the information about the organization, product or service being promoted.

Compounding the media professional's decision-making is the rapidly changing media environment due to the emergence of AI-content generators earlier this year. This semester we will explore both the ethical and legal issues raised by the use of ChatGPT and other AI-content generators in media practice. What challenges to verification, accuracy and independence do media professionals face as they incorporate AI-generated content into their communications? How do we incorporate AI-content generators into our media products while maintaining the integrity of our work? The class will examine the values of journalism and strategic media professions in light of the changes created by the availability of AI-content generators.

For news professionals today, journalism is not only practiced with new media platforms and tools but also done in a challenging economic environment. News organizations are struggling to survive the continuing fragmentation of their audience and the diminished advertising revenue stream. How do news organizations maintain the quality of their work given the substantial reductions in their income and workforce? Can news organizations still afford to uphold traditional news values? What do we sacrifice if we abandon traditional values to remain economically viable?

### **Accessing the Canvas website**

1. Go to the University of Memphis home page [www.memphis.edu](http://www.memphis.edu) and click on Canvas in the bottom-left corner.
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Find in your Fall 2023 course list and click the link for JRSM 4708 Media Ethics.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Prepare/write a case study analysis (10%) and lead the case study discussion in class (10%).**

Choose a case study listed in the Class/Assignment Schedule below (these cases are from the Wilkins, Painter, & Patterson textbook) and lead the class discussion of the case. Students can begin leading cases Tuesday, Sept. 12. You should choose a case that reflects your professional interests. You will sign up for case presentations during the fourth class, Sept. 7. Your instructor will provide case leadership models during the first two weeks of classes, but you are free to create your own models for leading the case.

Preparation for the presentation includes a careful review of the assigned readings related to the case, outside research on the particular case (if it is based on a genuine event and is not a hypothetical case study) and outside reading on the case's ethics topic (you might want to look for similar real-life ethical dilemmas and how they were analyzed/handled). Your outside research might provide additional information about the case, and you can include it in your paper and presentation.

In preparation for leading your case study in class, you will write up your analysis (a minimum of 750 words or three double-spaced pages of text) and submit your paper on the day you lead the case study in class. Writing up your analysis forces you to think through the issues of the case before you lead it. You will have 15 minutes for the in-class case presentation.

**Write your own professional code of ethics for the media practice you are preparing for or are already working in (15%).**

Whether you are/are going to be a news reporter, media designer, photographer, or strategic media (public relations or advertising) communicator, you are going to face some tough ethical decisions in your professional practice. This is your chance to think about your values and how they apply to your media profession. Certainly, you can consult existing codes of ethics in your professional area. I encourage you to do so. But don't just copy what they say. If you do, you need to cite them or the other outside sources you consulted in preparing your own code of ethical media practice, including any use of AI-content generators. Also, I want you to include in your code a statement about what your take on the ethical use of AI-content generators in the work you'll produce in your media profession. Your personal professional code of ethics is due Nov. 28.

**Exams (60%):**

You will write three in-class, closed-book exams.

Exam 1: Thursday, Sept. 28

Exam 2: Thursday, Nov. 2.

Exam 3: Tuesday, Dec. 12, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

**Participation (5% of grade):**

Read all assigned readings. You will have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the material when the professor calls on you to discuss the content of the readings in class. You might be asked to take a simple quiz on the readings (simple, of course, to those who have read the assignment). Participate in class discussions. The instructor will evaluate your participation for the final grade. Each absence over five absences will lower your participation grade by one point. If you're absent, you can't participate.

**Graduate Students enrolled in JRSM6708 have to write a formal, in-depth focus paper arising out of dilemma in the case study they lead. The graduate student paper counts 25%, and the case presentation counts 10%. For graduate students, the personal professional code of ethics counts 15%. For graduate students, each exam counts 15 %.**

Each graduate student will write an individual paper, a written analysis of the ethical issues presented by the case the student leads. Your paper should be a minimum 1,500 words, which equals about six pages, double-spaced pages of text. The paper will discuss the major ethics issues raised in the case and indicate how you would resolve the questions if you were faced with the scenario. This is not a “How do I feel about the issue” paper. Your paper should be a careful analysis in which you apply the philosophical principles and ethical models you learn in this class to the issues of the case. Cite relevant statements from authorities in media practice and ethics. Most of the cases are real-life events. I’m happy to discuss your ideas for the paper.

You should read and cite in the text of the paper at least six sources (other than your textbook and assigned articles), either magazine articles, journal articles, books or web information relevant to your case/topic. The University of Memphis library has databases that provide access to most media trade publications such as Columbia Journalism Review, PRWeek, Strategies & Tactics, AdWeek and Advertising Age as well as academic publications such as Journal of Mass Media Ethics and PR Review.

This paper’s style must use the American Psychological Association reference style. Style guides are available in the bookstore and the library as well as online. The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University offers an excellent presentation of the American Psychological Association reference style as well as a range of resources on the writing process. Click “APA Style” at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. Graduate student papers are due Nov. 28.

How grades are calculated:

	Undergraduates	Graduate students
Case study analysis paper	10 %	25
Case study leadership	10 %	10
Exam 1	20 %	15
Exam 2	20 %	15
Exam 3	20 %	15
Personal Professional Ethics Code	15 %	15
<u>Participation</u>	<u>5 %</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100 %	100 %

Number grades on tests translate into these letter grades: A, 90-100; B, 80-89; C, 70-79; D, 60-69; F, below 60.

**Guidance on use of AI-content generators for assignments in this class.**

In this class, we will examine the ethical use of AI-content generators. Certain assignments in this course may direct you to use ChatGPT for specific purposes and with specific directions. On those assignments, you may use ChatGPT as directed. On other outside written assignments, including your case study analysis and your personal professional code of ethics, you are not permitted to turn in any work that is created, completely or partially, by ChatGPT or another AI tool. Assignment submissions may be run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use of AI tools like ChatGPT may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an assignment.

**Class/Assignment Schedule:**

*The instructor reserves the right to change the schedule with notice in advance of assignments.*

Tuesday, Aug. 29, Welcome and introduction to study of media ethics.

Thursday, Aug. 31, Nature of ethical inquiry.

Patterson, chapter 1, "Introduction to Ethical Decision Making," pp. 1-10.

Case 8-E, Above the Fold, pp. 263-268

Tuesday, Sept. 5, Relevant philosophers; discussion of case study/paper assignment.

Patterson, chapter 1, "Introduction to Ethical Decision Making," pp. 10-25.

Thursday, Sept. 7, Relevant philosophers (continued)

In preparation for choosing a case study you will lead, please review the case studies in the class schedule below starting with the Sept. 12 class. Find a first, second and third choice. We will draw numbers for the order of case selection for the case study you will lead.

Case 4-E, Where Everybody Knows Your Name, pp. 123-126.

Tuesday, Sept. 12, Nature of truth and objectivity

Patterson, chapter 2, "Information Ethics: A Profession Seeks the Truth," pp. 29-39.

Case 2-F, When Is Objective Reporting Irresponsible Reporting? pp. 63-65.

Thursday, Sept. 14, Deception in pursuit of truth

Patterson, chapter 2, "Information Ethics: A Profession Seeks the Truth," pp. 40-49.

Mark Lisher, "Lying to Get the Truth," American Journalism Review, Oct/Nov 2007, available at <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4403>

Case 2-A, Rules of Engagement: Mary Louise Kelly and the Mike Pompeo Interview, pp. 50-53.

Tuesday, Sept. 19, Point of view: Fair and balanced

Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, available at

<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>; Radio Television Digital News Association Code of Ethics, available at <https://www.rtdna.org/ethics>.

Case 5-B, A Second Draft of History: The New York Times' 1619 Project, pp. 155-157.

Thursday, Sept. 21, Plagiarism and AI-generated content.

U of Memphis Statement on Academic Misconduct, available at

<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/students/academic-misconduct.php>

Jill Rosen, "Who Knows Jack?" American Journalism Review, April/May 2004, available at <https://ajrchive.org/article.asp?id=3613>

Case 5-C. When Journalists Question Algorithms and Automated Systems, pp 158-161

Tuesday, Sept. 26, Exam review

Thursday, Sept 28, Exam 1

Tuesday, Oct. 3, Promises of confidentiality: Promises to keep, promises to break.

“Talk to the Newsroom: New York Times Use of Anonymous Sources,”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/09/business/media/09askthetimes.html>

Case 2-D. Anonymous or Confidential: Unnamed News Sources in the News, pp. 58-61.

Thursday, Oct. 5, Privacy.

Patterson, chapter 3, “Privacy,” pp. 67-81.

Case 3-A, Harry and Meghan: Context and Control, pp. 82-84.

Tuesday, Oct. 10, Loyalties and the Potter Box.

Patterson, chapter 4, “Loyalty,” pp. 99-112.

Case 4-A, Cuomo Interviews Cuomo, pp. 113-115.

Thursday, Oct. 12, Reporting politics and government in the age of disinformation

Wilkins, chapter 5, “Mass Media in a Democratic Society,” pp. 131-149.

Case 5-A Murder the Media: Ethics on January 6, 2021, pp. 150-154

Tuesday, Oct. 17, Fall Break

Thursday, Oct. 19, Conflict of interest: Non-participation policies for journalists.

New York Times, “Ethical Journalism: A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Opinion Departments,” <https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/ethical-journalism.html#>

Case 4-C. Public/On-Air Journalist versus Private/Online Life: Can it Work? pp. 117-120.

Tuesday, Oct. 24, Journalism as a force for social justice/injustice

Wilkins, chapter 6, Informing a Just Society, pp. 173-186.

Case 6-D, Spotlight: It Takes a Village to Abuse a Child, pp. 196-199.

Thursday, Oct. 26, Diversity, equity and inclusion in media

Case 6-A, The *Kansas City Star* in Black and White: A Newspaper Apologizes for 140 Years of Coverage, pp. 187-189

Tuesday, Oct. 31, Exam Review

Thursday, Nov. 2, Exam 2

Tuesday, Nov. 7, Visual media ethics.

Patterson, chapter 8, “Picture This,” pp. 239-251.

National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics, available at

<https://nppa.org/resources/code-ethics>

Case 8-D, Problem Photos and Public Outcry, pp. 259-262.

Thursday, Nov. 9, Persuasive communications ethics

Patterson, chapter 7, “Strategic Communications,” pp. 207-218.

Case 4-F. Quit, Blow the Whistle, or Go with the Flow, pp. 126-130.

Tuesday, Nov. 14, Public relations ethics

Code of Ethics, Public Relations Society of America, available at [http://www.prsa.org/aboutUs/ethics/preamble\\_en.html](http://www.prsa.org/aboutUs/ethics/preamble_en.html) .

Case 7-A. Fyre Festival Becomes Fyre Fraud, pp. 223-225.

Thursday, Nov. 16, Advertising ethics

Patterson, chapter 7, "Strategic Communications," pp. 218-223.

American Advertising Federation Statement of Principles,

<http://www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=37> .

Case 7-D Keeping Up with the Kardashians' Prescription Drug Choices, pp. 231-233

Tuesday, Nov. 21, Influence of economic pressures on journalism

Patterson, chapter 9, "Media Economics," pp. 275-291.

Case 9-B, When Investigative Reporting is Bad for Business, pp. 296-298.

Thursday, Nov. 23, Thanksgiving

Tuesday, Nov. 28, Looking Ahead: The challenges AI-content generators present journalists as well as visual and strategic media professionals.

Case 9-F. Automated Journalism: The Rise of Robot Reporters, pp.308-310.

Thursday, Nov. 30, Students share personal professional code of ethics.

Tuesday, Dec. 5, Exam Review

Tuesday, Dec. 12, Exam 3, 10:30 a.m-12:30 p.m.

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Professional Values and Competencies in JRSM 4708**

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

### **How professional values and competencies will be met**

*Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Understand fundamental principles of moral philosophy and learn to apply those principles to professional decision-making.
- Analyze ethical dilemmas confronted by media professionals.
- Gain a sense of moral responsibility in their professional practice.

- Analyze and present to the class a case study of an ethical dilemma.
- Apply appropriate ethical principles to specific media problems/issues.

*Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Develop professional standards appropriate to the student's area media practice.
- Write a semester paper in which they analyze a media ethics case problem.
- Develop a personal code of ethics in which they articulate professional standards and practices appropriate to their chosen area of media practice.

### **How assessment of student learning will be met**

#### *Awareness*

- Class discussions will focus on ethical issues in media.
- Presentations will focus on ethical issues in media.

#### *Understanding*

- Essay exams will be used to determine the understanding of students.
- A final case study paper will be used to determine how the students understand the material.

#### *Application*

- Class presentations will offer solutions and analysis of one case study.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.



**Email**

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

**Electronic devices**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

**AI/Chat GPT**

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

**Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

**Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

**Academic integrity**

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree

that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

**Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.