

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

- An ability to describe the roles that the public plays in ensuring and critiquing ethical standards in the media
- An ability to compare and contrast Irish, UK, and US cases

Learning Outcomes

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

- Engage in critical thinking and evaluation;
- Master a body of knowledge;
- Communicate effectively both in writing and through oral presentations;
- Understand the impact of globalization on the creation of media content and the ethical issues facing journalists in a global community;
- Describe the similarities and differences between Irish, UK, and US cases;
- 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

- Barnes, J. 2001. Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Bernays, E.L. 2004 [1928]. Propaganda. New Ed ed. Brooklyn, NY 11238: Ig Publishing.
- Blackburn, S. 2009. Ethics: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Boczkowski, P. J. & Papacharissi, Z. (eds). 2018. Trump and the Media. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Brady, C. 2010. Did the Media Fail to Sound Alarm Bells Before the Financial Crisis? The Irish Times, 6 March 2010, pp.15.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/did-the-media-fail-to-sound-alarm-bells-before-the-financial-crisis-1.633555>
- Chibnall, S. 1973 The Production of Knowledge by Crime Reporters IN Cohen, S. & Young, J. The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media Rev. ed. London; Beverly Hills, Calif: Constable; Sage Publications.
- Cook, T. E. 2006. Freeing the Presses: The First Amendment in Action. Benson, NC: LSU Press
- Corcoran, M.P. and O'Brien, M. 2004. Political Censorship and the Democratic State: the Irish Broadcasting Ban. Dublin: Four Courts.
- Curran, J. and Seaton, J. 1988. Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain. 3rd ed. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Curran, J. 1977. Capitalism and the Control of the Press in Gurevitch, M., Curran, J., Roberts, C. and Open University. Mass Communication and Society Course Team. 1977. The Media: Contexts of Study. Milton Keynes, Eng: Open University Press. pp195-230.
- Davies, N. 2008. Flat Earth news: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media. London: Vintage Books.
- Gaber, I. 2009. Exploring the Paradox of Liberal Democracy: More Political Communications Equals Less Public Trust. Political Quarterly, 80(1), pp.84-91.
- Fahy, D., O'Brien, M., and Poti, V., 2010. "From Boom to Bust: a Post-Celtic Tiger Analysis of the Norms, Values and Roles of Irish Financial Journalists," Irish Communication Review: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 1.
- Fawkes, J. 2017. Public Relations Ethics and Professionalism: The Shadow of Excellence. London: Routledge
- Frost, C. 2000. Media Ethics and Self-Regulation. Harlow: Longman.
- Frost, C. 2007. Journalism Ethics and Regulation. Harlow: Longman.
- Haidt, J. 2012. The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion. London: Allen Lane.

- Harcup, T. 2007. *The Ethical Journalist*. 1st ed. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. 2002. *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Horgan, J. 1995. Saving Us From Ourselves: Contraception, Censorship and the 'Evil Literature' Controversy of 1926. *Irish Communications Review*, [5] pp.61-67
- Impress, 2020. 'About Us'. Available at: <https://www.impress.press/about-us/> [25 Oct 2020].
- Independent Press Standards Organisation (UK). 2020. 'What we do'. Available at: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/what-we-do/> [25 Oct 2020].
- Kant, I. 2005. *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Translated & Analysed by H.J. Paton). London: Routledge.
- Kenny, C. (2009) 'Significant Television: Journalism, Sex Abuse and the Catholic Church,' in *Irish Communications Review*, pp.63-76.
- Knowlton, S.R. and Reader, B. 2009. *Moral Reasoning for Journalists*. 2nd ed. Westport, Conn: Praeger.
- Kohring, M. and Matthes, J. 2007. Trust in News Media. *Communication Research*, 34(2), pp.231-252.
- Law, S. 2006. *The War for Children's Minds*. Abingdon, OX; New York: Routledge.
- Lippmann, W. 2009. *Public Opinion*. Milton Keynes: Lightning Source.
- London School of Economics. 2018. Articles on Leveson inquiry (tag) Available at: [25 Oct 2020] <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/tag/leveson-inquiry/>
- Marchi, R. 2012. With Facebook, Blogs, and Fake News, Teens Reject Journalistic "Objectivity". *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(3), pp.246-262.
- McNair, B. 2004. PR Must Die: Spin, Anti-Spin and Political Public Relations in the UK, 1997-2004. *Journalism Studies*, 5(3), pp.325-338.
- Meyers, C. (ed). 2010. *Journalism Ethics: A Philosophical Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- National Union of Journalists. 2016. Submission to the Statutory Review of the Defamation Act. Available at: [25 Oct 2020] http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National_Union_of_Journalists.pdf/Files/National_Union_of_Journalists.pdf

- New Yorker, 2018 'Articles on Trump and Fake News' [tag]. Available at: [25 Oct 2020] <https://www.newyorker.com/tag/fake-news>
- O'Brien, M. 2007 Selling Fear: The Changing Face of Crime Reporting in Ireland IN Horgan, J., O'Connor, B., M.A. and Sheehan, H. 2007. Mapping Irish Media: Critical Explorations. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- O'Connell, M. 1999 'Is Irish Public Opinion Towards Crime Distorted by Media Bias?' in European Journal of Communication, Vol. 14 (2)
- O'Malley, T. and Soley, C. 2000. Regulating the Press. London: Pluto.
- Parekh, B. (ed). 2012. Jeremy Bentham. London: Routledge.
- Parekh, B. (ed). 2017. Bentham's Political Thought. London: Routledge.
- Parsons, P. J. 2016. Ethics in Public Relations: A Guide to Best Practice. London: Kogan Page.
- Press Council of Ireland (2018) Code of Practice. Available at: [25 Oct 2020] <http://www.presscouncil.ie/code-of-practice>
- PRII. 2018. Submission to The Department of Justice On The Review Of The Defamation Act 2009 From The Public Relations Institute Of Ireland. Available at: [25 Oct 2020] https://www.prii.ie/assets/uploads/documents/DefamationAct2009_Review-PRII_Submission.Pdf
- Rachels, J. and Rachels, S. 2010. The Elements of Moral Philosophy: James Rachels; sixth ed. by Stuart Rachels. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Reynolds, P. 2006. Crime in Ireland [address by RTÉ Crime Correspondent to Ceifin] www.ceifin.com/resources/paper/PaulReynolds_CrimeCorrespondentRTE.pdf
- Sanders, K. 2003. Ethics & Journalism. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Todorov, T. 2009. In Defence of the Enlightenment. London: Atlantic Books.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	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.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Class participation/small group discussion	20%
Oral presentation	20%
In-class quizzes	10%
Midterm	20%
Final exam	30%
Overall grade	100%

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:
 - Brady, C., 2010. Did the Media Fail to Sound Alarm Bells Before the Financial Crisis? The Irish Times, 6 March 2010, pp.15.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/did-the-media-fail-to-sound-alarm-bells-before-the-financial-crisis-1.633555>

- Fahy, D., O'Brien, M., and Poti, V., 2010. "From Boom to Bust: a Post-Celtic Tiger analysis of the Norms, Values and Roles of Irish Financial Journalists," Irish Communication Review: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 1.

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:
 - O'Brien, M. (2007) "Selling Fear: The Changing Face of Crime Reporting in Ireland" in Horgan, J. et al Mapping Irish Media [Key Reading].
 - Chibnall, S. (1973) "The Production of Knowledge by Crime Reporters" in Cohen, S. & Young, J: The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media.
 - Reynolds, P. "Crime in Ireland" [address by RTÉ Crime Correspondent to Ceifin]. www.ceifin.com/resources/paper/PaulReynolds_CrimeCorrespondentRTE.pdf
 - O'Connell, M. (1999) "Is Irish Public Opinion Towards Crime Distorted by Media Bias?" in European Journal of Communication, Vol. 14 (2).

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](#).