

Free copy

JCOM. 4010 --Media Ethics
Spring 2006
BUS 320, Tuesdays 5 - 7:45 p.m.

Professor Nancy Williams

Office: AnSci 306

Office hours: Monday & Friday, 11 - noon; Wednesday 12:30-1:30; also by appointment

Phone: 797-3299

E-mail: nanwill@cc.usu.edu

About this class: JCOM 4010 is an upper division journalism class focused on both skills and theory, and a DSS (Depth, Social Science) class for the university. Students who enroll are expected to write and think critically, at the level expected of seniors in college. Our discussions and readings should challenge you to find theories, reasons and logical arguments that support your most deeply held beliefs, help you organize and express those thoughts persuasively, and help you learn the language of moral reasoning. You might change your mind here -- and you may help change the minds of others.

My guarantee: If you came into this class knowing there was only one way to act ethically as a media professional, you'll leave it less sure of that. You'll discover that the answers all exist within you -- but you won't find them without wrestling them into your consciousness through systematic thinking.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Patterson and Wilkins, *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases*, 5th edition (McGraw-Hill)

Sissela Bok, *Common Values* (University of Missouri)

Also, I expect you to keep up on current stories with ethical dimensions by reading a daily Utah newspaper. *The Salt Lake Tribune*, *Deseret Morning News*, and *Logan Herald Journal* are available at the Merrill-Cazier Library and Taggart Student Center; the *Trib* and the *News* are also available in full text online. *The New York Times* is also available free online, although you'll need to register at the site. (<http://nytimes.com>)

CLASS BLOG: <http://aggieblue.blogspot.com>

If you don't have a Blogger account, you'll need to register at <http://blogger.com>

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING: Expect to be thinking, writing, and defending your arguments on the class blog, presenting & discussing orally in class, and applying theories of ethical thought to the daily news coverage you find in the media.

Blog participation – 100 points (5 points possible for each post you make that *raises a substantive question or responds substantively to a question* raised by someone else. (Print out the 20 posts you want to have considered for this part of your grade and put them in your portfolio at the end of the semester.)

Group presentation to the class of one chapter of Bok's *Common Values* – 50 points

Midterm exam - 100 points

Individual participation (includes case commentary work in class) – 50 points

Film commentaries (4 of the 5 movies, 25 points each) – 100 points

Final portfolio and self-evaluation paper – 100 points

Final class grades are based on your percentage of the 500 possible points. 94-100 percent is an A, 90-93 percent an A-, 87- 89 is a B+, 84-86 a B, 80-83 a B-, 77-79 a C+, 74-76 a C, 70-73 a C-, 64-69 a D, 63 and below an F. Late assignments will incur grade penalties of 5 percent per day. Written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date.

SCHEDULE (I reserve the right to make changes as needed in order to reflect current news controversies.)

I expect you to have completed the required readings before class on the date noted so you're prepared to discuss them. When there are current ethics problems in the news media I expect you to be familiar with them, especially any links that have been posted or discussed on the class blog. Also, bring your book to class, as we'll be using the cases for small group work.

Jan. 10 **Welcome & introduction to class expectations. Archeological digs: lists & trees.**

Jan. 17 **Values: Identifying personal and professional ethics**

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapters 1-2.

Discussion: Values: Professional vs. personal. Introduction to ethical decision making & models.

Blog: (to be posted by Monday, Jan. 24): Introduce yourself. Describe your top five personal values. How do they fit (or not) with what you believe the media value? Where do they not fit, and is the clash resolvable if you're looking at a future in a media profession?

Jan. 24 **Foundations of Ethical Thought: Virtue, Duty and Consequences and Justice theories**

Reading: Notes by Charles D. Kay, on Egoism, Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, and Rawl's Theory of Justice, available online at <http://truth.wofford.edu/~kavcd/ethics/index.html>

Discussion: Case studies, chapter 21

Blog: (posted by Monday, Jan. 30) Write about the roots of your own ethical philosophy. Is it the same one you embraced as a child? Has it changed as you matured? Would you call your ethical values virtue-based, utilitarian, duty-based, care-based, or communitarian? Why?

Jan. 31 **Ethical Decision-making**

Film: "Absence of Malice" (1981, Sally Field and Paul Newman)

Blog: (posted by Monday, Feb. 6) This film contains a laundry list of ethics problems. List as many as you remember, and discuss the one you found most problematic.

Feb. 7 **Loyalties: How do you choose between competing allegiances?**

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, Chapter 4

Discussion: Social contracts and cases from chapter 4

Film Commentary #1, Absence of Malice (due today, Feb. 7, at the beginning of class)

Blog: (posted by Monday, Feb. 13): To whom do journalists owe loyalty? What about PR practitioners? Where does it rank on your scale of professional values?

Feb. 13 **Information Ethics & the Search for Truth**

Reading: Review Patterson & Wilkins, chapter 2; Google and read background on Jason Blair and Stephen Glass cases.

Film: "Shattered Glass" (2003)

Blog: (posted by Monday, Feb. 20) Comment on any current journalism ethics issue.

Feb. 21 **Media and Deception**

Readings: Google for background and analysis of the Bush administration's secret wiretaps of private citizens and the New York Times' decision to hold the story for a year before they published it. (Here's a starting point: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0106/p09s01-cods.html>)

Discussion: plagiarism, NSA wiretap story, NYT Judith Miller case, Jason Blair

Film commentary #2, Shattered Glass (due today in class)

Blog: Is deception by the news media ever justified? What do you think about the NY Times' holding the NSA wiretapping story for a year?

Feb. 28 Persuasion Ethics: What's fair in advertising and public relations

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapters 3 and 5

Film: "Bowling for Columbine" (2002)

Blog: Which of your ethics might be for sale? At what price?.

March 7

MIDTERM exam

Film Commentary #3, Bowling for Columbine (due today in class)

Blog: Why is the relationship between journalism and public relations both symbiotic and strained?

March 14

NO CLASS -- spring break!!!!!!!

March 21 Ethics of Photo and Video Journalism

Film: "The Killing Fields" (1984; historical background here: <http://www.dithpran.org/killingfields.htm>)

Blog: How much can a journalist ask others to risk, to get a story? What kind of grade would you give Western media for their coverage of Eastern cultures?

March 28 Media Economics: Should profit drive journalism?

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapter 8

Common Values presentation, Chapter 1 group

Discussion: Cases from chapter 8

Film Commentary #4, The Killing Fields, due at beginning of class

Blog: Using Case VIII-A (advertising in Ms. Magazine), explain and discuss your thoughts about any ONE of the Macro issues listed at the end of it.

April 4 Privacy in the Global Village

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapter 6

Common Values presentation, Chapter 2 group

Discussion: Cases, chapter 6

Blog: Utah keeps a database of convicted sex offenders on the Internet at

<http://corrections.utah.gov/community/sexoffenders/> Do you see any potential ethical problems with this?

April 11 Ethics in Cyberspace

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapter 9

Common Values presentation, Chapter 3 group

Discussion: Cases, chapter 9

Blog: Conflict is usually listed as a traditional news value. How can media adhere to that value without sacrificing the ethical news values of accuracy, tenacity and equity?

April 18 Media and Social Justice

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapter 7

Film: "Schindler's List" (1993) – Class will go until 8 tonight for this 3-hour film

Blog: What are the ethical implications for journalism and democracy as media ownership becomes concentrated in fewer, wealthier corporations? Why should the media be concerned about social justice?

April 25 Moral adulthood: Where do we go from here?

Reading: Patterson & Wilkins, chapters 10 & 11

Common Values presentation, Chapter 4 and 5 groups

Film commentary #5, Schindler's List, due at beginning of class

Blog: "An important part of moral development is the recognition that motive, not consequence, is the critical factor in deciding whether an act is ethical." What does that sentence mean to you?

May 2, by noon: Final paper and portfolio due. You may hand these in at the JCOM office, AnSci 310.