

# SYLLABUS

J397: Mass Media Ethics

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## Why a course in ethics?

Media professionals spend a great deal of time talking about “doing the right thing.” Why is it then that the consumers of mass media perennially find so much fault with the ethics of the disseminators of news, information, and entertainment? What has led the purveyors of mass communication to believe and act the way they do? Do they have a special obligation to ethical behavior that we, as ordinary citizens, do not; or do they, in fact, have a special waiver of the basic moral tenets that the rest of us must accept in order that we might have access to a “free marketplace of ideas?” These are the questions we must ask ourselves if we are to be moral agents of the mass media.

## Course Objectives:

This course is designed to familiarize you with the tools needed to make moral decisions regarding the use of mass media. You should realize from the outset that there are no right answers in this course—only answers that are most appropriate in certain situations. To whom they are the most appropriate is a major concern of this course. Many questions will be asked, and many answers will be discussed. Ultimately, it will be up to you to draw your own conclusions about the rightness of the answers you choose to accept. Ideally, you will come away with a greater appreciation for the complexities of making a moral decision. At the very least, you will be forced to develop a personal yardstick by which to measure your decisions.

## Text:

*Mixed Media: Moral Distinctions in Advertising, Public Relations, and Journalism*, 2nd Ed., by Bivins.

## Conduct of the course:

The class will meet twice a week for an hour and twenty minutes each. During that time, we will freely discuss issues of ethics in the mass media—primarily print and broadcast journalism, advertising, and public relations. Since most, if not all, of our discussion will be based on informed opinion, it is mandatory that you come to class prepared with the appropriate readings. You will be expected to contribute when called on, and to offer your opinion when you feel moved to do so.

## Readings and Homework:

There will be reading and homework assignments for every class. They will appear on the web site on the [Assignments](#) page. THESE MAY CHANGE AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE. It is in your best interest to check the web site frequently for changes. No assignment will be changed or added any later than 24 hours before it is due. Homework assignments will consist primarily of three types:

- Case study analysis or questions from the text or other sources
- Essays over readings, usually one- to two-pages
- Additional assignments as they come up

Homework assignments for the first day of class each week will typically be more detailed and require more work. This is because of the amount of time you will have to accomplish them (typically, four days). Homework assignments for the second day of class each week will be somewhat less detailed and consist mostly of case studies and short essays on readings. See below under [grading](#) for the difference in weighting for these assignment types.

Homework assignments can be accessed on this site and on Blackboard. However, Assignments should be completed on the Blackboard site. Just click on "Assignments" in the main menu for the course, select the appropriate assignment, complete and submit it by 8:00 a.m. on the day it is due. You may use the Blackboard form to prepare your assignment or attach it as a Microsoft Word or pdf file. Assignments that call for examples will require you to provide links to URLs or scanned documents. If this proves difficult or impossible, you may turn in examples in hard copy.

All homework must be submitted **PRIOR TO THE START OF CLASS**. You should print out a copy for yourself to keep for class discussion. **NO HOMEWORK WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER CLASS HAS BEGUN**. (See "Acceptable Absences" below for exceptions.) Assignments not date stamped by 8:00 a.m. will receive a 10-point penalty.

Homework assignments will be graded within approximately one week after they are turned in. It is in your best interest to keep a copy in case there is a discrepancy in your final grade at the end of the term.

Essays can be either single- or double-spaced, using both sides of the paper if you prefer. A typical one-page essay would be approximately 350 words. A typical two-page essay would be approximately 700 words. Thoughtfulness of response is a key element in determining your grade.

All grades will be kept on [Blackboard](#). It is your responsibility to check your grades weekly to make sure everything you turned in has been accounted for. If there is a discrepancy, you should notify the GTFs *immediately*. If you wait until the end of the term to note missing grades, it will be too late.

## How to succeed with your homework assignments

Because the greatest portion of your grade will be based on the successful completion of homework assignments, it is imperative that you put your best effort into each of them.

- Readings are a vital part of this class. They do not supplement lectures, rather they are the heart of the course. Lectures supplement readings. Therefore, a successful homework assignment must reflect the readings. A successful assignment will show not only that you have done the readings, but also that you can use what you have read. As readings accumulate throughout the term, your homework assignments should reflect your growing knowledge.
- Although we value your opinion, we would like to see your opinion informed by what you are learning in this class. An assignment based solely on your opinion is not a successful assignment.
- Unless length is specified, you should use your own judgment to determine whether you have answered the questions associated with the assignment sufficiently.
- This is a School of Journalism and Communication. We expect good grammar and good style. We will subtract points for sloppy work.
- If an assignment seems unclear, it is up to you to contact the GTFs or instructor to help clarify it for you.
- Plagiarism is considered a serious offense. You are expected to indicate where you get your information (unless it is understood from the readings) and mark all quotations as such. Although you are allowed to work together if you wish, identical papers will be considered plagiarism.

## Grading Criteria for written work—exams, essays, research papers, homework, and other assignments:

**F**—Reveals you really have no clue what is going on, or are so carelessly inattentive to matters of style as to write an incomprehensible response.

**D**—Reveals less than adequate understanding of theory, concept, or other relevant information. Answer may also misapply concept, use an inappropriate or weak example in attempting to clarify an explanation, or may ramble on in the hope that something will eventually hit the intended target. Answer also may be more or less on target, but carelessly or sloppily written/proofed.

**C**—Provides an on-target recitation of the correct material from the text or other sources being consulted. Answer meets the basic expectations with respect to number of outside sources, or other conditions of a specific assignment. The writing, while clear and comprehensible, is otherwise non-exceptional, or gives evidence of inattention to basic matters of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

**B**—Is not only on-target, but is written in a clear, well-organized style, with few errors (and indicates attention given to correcting spelling or punctuation mistakes). In addition, examples illustrate thought beyond recall or recitation of a text's commentary and adds to the overall

understanding of the theory, concept, or other materials being evaluated. There is evidence of having gone beyond the text to consult other sources of information that might be relevant.

**A**—Goes beyond that required for a "B" response to indicate critical analysis, offering evidence of a cogent, well-reasoned defense of a position or argument that is advanced relative to the object under consideration. In other words, the answer reveals a clear authorial voice in command of the material. In addition, the style is elegant, indicating careful attention to presenting a well-constructed, well-thought-out response that advances understanding, stimulates thought or is otherwise evidence of exceptional thinking. As should be clear, inattention to matters of style/format will result in a corresponding decrease in a grade, even when content is otherwise clear and on-target. As a further explanation of these criteria, consider the following comments:

- A "C" answer is a good answer—it simply does not do any more than is being asked.
- A "B" answer is a better answer, but does not reveal depth of analysis that would be required to be considered exceptional.
- An "A" is an exceptional piece of work. Simply understanding the material is not the equivalent of an "A."

### **Extra credit**

If there are any extra credit opportunities, they will be noted in advance on the syllabus or announced in class and will be made available to the entire class. *Please do not ask for individual extra credit work.* Allowing individual extra credit would obviously disadvantage the rest of the class.

### **Attendance & Class Participation:**

Attendance is mandatory for this class. We will gauge attendance through homework assignments and occasional in-class exercises or quizzes.

Class participation is greatly encouraged. Merely sitting in class is not participating. Part of what you learn in this class will depend on your level of involvement.

### **Exams:**

There will be a single exam given around the middle of the term. It will cover all readings, lectures, and discussions to that point in the term. A study guide will be provided prior to the exam. **NO EARLY OR LATE EXAM IS GIVEN.** (See "Acceptable Absences" below.)

The exam will be taken in class on laptop computers. If you do not have a laptop, you must let the instructor or GTFs know well in advance. Laptops can be checked out through the UO Library: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/scilib/laptops.html>

There is no final in this class.

## Acceptable Absences:

The ONLY acceptable absences are:

- students participating in University-sanctioned athletic or academic events,
- illness,
- verifiable emergencies (other than illness) only if accompanied by a note from the office of academic advising.

Please e-mail the instructor or the GTFs about your absence AS FAR IN ADVANCE AS POSSIBLE. We will make arrangements for missed homework and/or exams.

## Grading:

All grades will be kept on the course Blackboard site. Grades will be entered approximately one week after assignments/exams are handed in. All grades are weighted according to the breakout below. Blackboard will display a running, weighted total that will inform you of your current grade in the class as each assignment is entered. It is up to you to double-check your class standing each week and alert the instructor or GTFs if you feel there is a discrepancy. Waiting until the end of the term to note a missing grade is considered too late.

Final grades will be based on the successful completion of the following:

- Homework due on the first class day each week: 50%
- Homework due on the second class day each week: 20%
- An exam covering readings and lecture: 30%

## A Note on Incompletes

An “incomplete” or “I” grade is awarded when a student’s work is satisfactory and the student is passing the class but a minor (yet essential) requirement for the class has not yet been completed for reasons that are acceptable to the instructor. An incomplete must be requested of the instructor and an arrangement made (typically a signed contract) to make up the work needed to remove the incomplete. At that point students have one calendar year to complete the work and have the “I” changed to a regular grade. If the grade is not changed by the instructor, the “I” will be converted into an “F” and the “F” will be factored into the student’s GPA.

***“I” grades can only be changed by the instructor of the course.*** Students who register and complete the same class in another term will earn a grade for that term. The original “I” will remain an “I” in the original term until the 12-month period is over. Then, it will convert to an “F.”

For example, if you took J397 from Professor Bivins in Fall 2009 and earned an “I,” you need to work with Prof. Bivins within one calendar year to have that incomplete removed. If you don't, after Fall 2010, that “I” grade will automatically change into an “F.”

But, suppose that after receiving the “I,” you decide to register for J397 again in Summer 2010 and take it with someone other than Professor Bivins. *This is a common mistake*. If you do this, you will receive a grade for J397 for Summer 2010. BUT, your “I” grade from Fall 2008 will not go away and will still become an “F” after one year.

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## Student Rights

1. You have the right to receive regular and organized instruction and guidance consistent with the aims of this course.
2. Your grade in this course will be determined only by academic achievement consistent with the aims and content of the course. At the beginning of the course, you will be made aware of the factors that will be considered in determining the grade such as class attendance, class participation, papers, examinations, projects and/or presentations. Those will be the sole determinants of your grade.
3. You will be graded solely on the basis of your reasoned answers and appropriate knowledge of the subjects and disciplines you study, not on the basis of your political or religious beliefs.
4. You have the right to have papers and tests graded and returned within a reasonable amount of time.
5. Curricula and reading lists in this class reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge in the area of ethics by providing you with dissenting sources and viewpoints where appropriate. While, as your instructor, I am free to pursue my own findings and perspectives in presenting my views, I will consider and make you aware of other viewpoints. Academic disciplines should welcome a diversity of approaches to unsettled questions. This class is no exception.
6. Exposing you to the spectrum of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in this course is a major responsibility of the instructor. I will try not to use this course for the purpose of political, ideological, religious or anti-religious indoctrination. If you think I am, you have the right to call me on it.
7. You have the right to an environment conducive to the civil exchange of ideas as an essential component of a free university.
8. You have the right to speak freely in class, expressing your individual viewpoint. You have the right to disagree with the instructor and with other students, as long as it is done in a civil manner.
9. You have the right to meet with your instructor to ask questions about or discuss course material, either during office hours or during a scheduled appointment. With reasonable limitations, this includes email inquiries and phone calls.

## Student Responsibilities

1. You are responsible for learning the content and the skills required by this course.
2. You are responsible for being honest in all of your classes, including this one. You will not cheat on examinations, copy another student's work, plagiarize from secondary sources or from other students or engage in any other forms of academic dishonesty.
3. You have the responsibility to attend their classes; you are expected to arrive by the beginning and remain for the class period. Attendance policies are stated in the course syllabus. You have the responsibility of notifying your instructor or the GTFs of extended absences due to illness or other allowable reasons. If you know that you will be absent on a particular day, the you are responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day.
4. If you miss a class, you are responsible for making up the work by obtaining any notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due—but only if the absence is allowable under the guidelines set forth in the course syllabus and the instructor has agree to let you make up the missed work.

## Classroom Etiquette

The following ground rules have been developed out of respect for both the students and the instructors in this class. Inhibiting the learning process of those seriously interested in this subject will be considered rude and immature.

1. **Coming to class on time:** Coming to class late interrupts the flow of the lecture and distracts the rest of the students. You are expected to come on time and be seated and attentive when class begins. If you must be late for a legitimate reason, please inform the instructor or the GTFs in advance.
2. **Once class starts:** Put away the morning paper and other distractions. Although you're not expected to be completely silent during the class, you are expected to keep your thoughts on the subject and your comments at least related to the topic.
3. **Leaving early:** If you must leave early for a legitimate reason, please let the instructor or GTFs know in advance. This class is an hour and 20 minutes long. Unless you have a medical problem, please visit the restroom prior to class and refrain from leaving for that purpose during class.
4. **Laptop computers:** Notes for most of the lectures are available online. If you feel you need to use a laptop in class, you must sit in the first three rows and restrict your use to course-related work.
5. **Other electronic equipment:**  
MP3/4 players are not allowed during class time. Cell phones must be turned off or set to silent.
6. **A word about free speech and civility:**  
This is a class about thoughts and opinions. Everyone in this class in entitled to speak

freely their thoughts and offer their opinions. However, we must keep in mind that speech may offend, and opinions can sometimes denigrate their opposites. When we offer our thoughts and opinions in class, we must do so with respect for those who might disagree, and with a level of civility expected of intelligent citizens operating within an environment that fosters learning.

*This syllabus is subject to change at any time; however, you will generally be given ample notice if it does.*