

Ethics and the Media Professions

Spring 2022

Time: T-Th 5:00–5:55pm
Location: Hall of Languages 207
Instructor: Dr. Augie Faller
Office: 529 HL
Office Hours: Mondays 4–5pm on Zoom
or by appt at calendly.com/augiefaller
Email: avfaller@syr.edu

Teaching Assistants:

Sanggu Lee
Email: slee192@syr.edu
Office hours: Wed 3:30–5:30pm
Yaojun Lu
Email: ylu46@syr.edu
Office hours: W & Th 7–8pm

Please communicate with TAs first about assignments and grades

Course Description

Should a reporter publish an important story even if it puts a source at risk? Have click-bait articles harmed online media? Is it acceptable for an actor to play a character that was intended to be of a different race? These are just a few of the ethical problems faced by media professionals today. This course takes on these challenges by presenting some of the ethical theories in the Western tradition and applying them to specific cases. Readings are drawn from diverse sources including philosophy, sociology, law, and the Internet. Guest speakers will offer diverse and insider perspectives on the issues we discuss. Students will complete a variety of assignments that encourage critical sensitivity about complex ethical issues.

Learning Outcomes

1. Express your own views clearly in class discussion and respectfully engage with the views of your classmates.
2. Apply some of the basic ethical theories concerning what makes an action right or wrong to current issues.
3. Read and reflect on the moral landscape of major issues in media ethics and some of the considerations that come into play in difficult moral dilemmas.
4. Produce writing on media ethics that is based on a careful analysis of arguments and real world scenarios, implementing logical tools presented early in the semester.

Evaluation

Participation 10% of grade.

Most weeks there will be short assignments or quizzes completed in class, in both discussion section and lecture. These will be graded on completion, and will count toward your participation grade.

Discussion posts 20% of grade

Starting in Week 2, you will be asked to write a **short** post about the assigned reading, graded on completion. The posts should be between 50 and 150 words in length. The post should focus on a particular question, concept, claim, or argument from the reading and discuss it critically and from your own point of view, with the aim of either:

a) deepening our understanding of the reading by raising the question, concept, claim, or argument *or*

b) communicating an objection to a claim or an argument.

Please do not merely summarize the reading but try to raise a useful question or to persuade us to see it, or the problems it discusses, in a certain way. Think of the post as your contribution to a philosophical discussion on the topic of the reading.

Posts are due by 11am on Wednesday, on your section's Blackboard page.

If you have to miss class, you still need to submit a post. The posts cannot be made up without permission.

Short Assignments: 20% of grade

You will be given two short analytical writing assignments, the first due TBA, the second due TBA.

Midterm: 20% of grade

There will be a take-home midterm assignment consisting of short answer questions.

Final: 30% of grade

Like the midterm, but with short-essay questions that require slightly longer answers.

Grades

Grade	Grade Points	Percentage Range
A	4.00	94–100%
A-	3.667	90–93%
B+	3.333	87–89%
B	3.000	83–86%
B-	2.667	80–82%
C+	2.333	77–79%
C	2.000	73–76%
C-	1.667	70–72%
D	1.000	60–69%
F	0	0–59%

Inclusiveness Guidelines

Racially inclusive behavior avoids assuming someone’s racial or ethnic identity as well as knowledge or characteristics based on identity. Race- and gender-inclusive language uses words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their race and gender. Gender-inclusive language avoids assuming a male speaker (‘freshman’, ‘upperclassman’, ‘mankind’, etc.), erasing non-binary gender identifications (‘men and women’; do use ‘Latinx’ instead of ‘Latino/a’), and conflating biological sex with gender expression (‘women have a uterus’). Race-inclusive language avoids using racially-loaded terms except when explicitly discussing the term itself (and even then please be mindful of how your speech affects other students).

Here are some helpful guidelines for how to be more inclusive in our speech and writing:

<https://content-guide.18f.gov/our-style/inclusive-language/>

Following these guidelines is essential to fostering an inclusive environment at Syracuse.

Students with a Disability

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu>. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Tutoring

Syracuse University is committed to your success. To that end, there are several tutoring centers on campus, including the Tutoring & Study Center (TSC), the Writing Center, and the Athletics Academic Services Center. I encourage you to use these services. All schedules and locations are posted on the TSC website: <http://tutoring.syr.edu>.

Religious Observation

SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. SU does not have non-instructional days for any religious holidays; however, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes.

Notes on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism: Any work you submit must be wholly your own. If you are unsure whether something you've done might count as plagiarism, please consult one of your instructors.

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system **Turnitin**. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at SU and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Course Materials

All readings will be available through the Blackboard site.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments should be completed by the day at which they are listed.

Week 1: Introduction

Tues 1/25:

Russ Schafer-Landau, Introduction to *The Fundamentals of Ethics*
Perry et al, "Logical Toolkit"

For discussion section:

No discussion section

Thurs 1/27:

Patrick Plaisance, *Media Ethics*, Chapter 2: Key Frameworks

Week 2

Tues 2/1: Egoism and Consequentialism

Russ Shafer-Landau, Chapter 8 and 9, "Ethical Egoism" and "Consequentialism: Its Nature and Attractions"

For discussion section:

Joshua Keating (for Foreign Policy), "Is it wrong to care more about 4 deaths in Boston than 80 in Syria?"

David Folkenflik (for NPR), "Is there a hierarchy of the importance of death in the news business?"

Thurs 2/3: Consequentialism cont.

Russ Shafer-Landau, Chapter 10, "Consequentialism: Its Difficulties"
Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (short story)

Week 3

Tues 2/8: Kantian ethics

Russ Schafer-Landau, Chapters 11 and 12, "The Kantian Perspective: Fairness and Justice" and "The Kantian Perspective: Autonomy and Respect"

For discussion section:

Edward Wasserman for NYT Opinion, "Julian Assange and the Woeful State of Whistle-Blowers"

Thurs 2/10: Truth and transparency

Patrick Plaisance, *Media Ethics*, Chapter 5: Transparency

***** Short Assignment 1 Due 2/13 *****

Week 4

Tues 2/15

James Rachels, "Why Privacy Is Important"
Nicholas Kristof (NYT), "Media's Balancing Act"

For discussion section:

NYT Opinion, "You're Being Watched Right Now" (video)
Try out the Electronic Frontier Foundation's "Cover Your Tracks" tool

Thurs 2/17

Anthony Lewis, "Journalistic Freedom and Privacy: A Case of Relative Compatibility"

Week 5

Tues 2/22

Andrei Marmor, "Privacy and Social Media"

For discussion section:

Jon Keegan and Alfred Ng (*The Markup*), "Gay/Bi Dating App, Muslim Prayer Apps Sold Data on People's Location to a Controversial Data Broker"

Thurs 2/24

C. Thi Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"

Week 6

Tues 3/1

The *Harper's* open letter on cancel culture
Mark Bray, "'So Much for the Tolerant Left!': 'No Platform' and Free Speech"

For discussion section:

Bella Rios, "Doxxing or Due Diligence?" (Case Study)
Vegas Tenold, "To Doxx a Racist"

Thurs 3/3:

Midterm Review Session

Week 7

Tues 3/8: The harm in hate speech

Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Chapter 4 (focus on section "Assurance" and what follows)

For discussion section:

N. K. Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" (short story)

Thurs 3/10:

Guest speaker TBA

***** Midterm Due 3/11*****

Week 8

Tues 3/15: SPRING BREAK

Thurs 3/17: SPRING BREAK

Week 9

Tues 3/22: Body shame in pop culture

Citations Needed Episode 149: How Fatness Became a Cheap Joke and Proxy for Moral Deficiency in Pop Culture

For discussion section:

Kate Manne, "Diet Culture Is Unhealthy. It's Also Immoral"

Kaila Prins, "3 Reasons Why Body-Positive Ad Campaigns Are Less Empowering Than You Think" (Everyday Feminism)

Thurs 3/24: From body shame to pride

Céline Leboeuf, "What Is Body Positivity? The Path from Shame to Pride"

Week 10

Tues 3/29: Consent and exploitation

Onora O'Neill, "Between Consenting Adults" (final section optional)

For discussion section:

Jina Moore, "Five Ideas on Meaningful Consent in Trauma Journalism"

Thurs 3/31: Reality TV

Wendy Wyatt, *The Ethics of Reality TV*, Chapter 10, "Exploitation: When Reality TV Becomes Degradation TV"

Week 11

Tues 4/5:

C. Thi Nguyen and Matthew Strohl, Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups

For discussion section:

Hanif Abdurraqib (for Stereogum), "The White Stripes Turn 20"

Allegra Frank (for Vox), "Scarlett Johansson defends her desire to play any person, any race, or "any tree" she wants"

Thurs 4/7:

NYT, "The White Internet's Love Affair With Digital Blackface" (video)

Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme" (*Real Life Mag*)

manuel arturo abreu, "Online Imagined Black English" (*Arachne*)

***** Short Assignment 2 Due 4/10 *****

Week 12

Tues 4/12: Overview of propaganda

Anne Quaranto and Jason Stanley, "Propaganda"

For discussion section:

Noam Chomsky: The Mass Media Machine (Al Jazeera "Media Theorized" video series)

Alec Karakatsanis Twitter thread

Thurs 4/14: The filter model of propaganda

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Chapter 1 and Afterward
BBC interview with Noam Chomsky

Week 13

Tues 4/19:

Media Ethics Initiative, "Objectivity in Journalism: Ethical Requirement or Impediment?"

For discussion section:

Sarah Li (for Teen Vogue), "Journalistic Objectivity Isn't Realistic, Young Reporters Say"

Steve Rose (for the Guardian), "'Death to the infidels!' Why it's time to fix Hollywood's problem with Muslims"

Thurs 4/21:

Stephen Ward, "Inventing Objectivity" in *Journalism Ethics : A Philosophical Approach*

Week 14

Tues 4/26: Unjust disbelief

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 1

For discussion section:

FiveThirtyEight, "How The Media Has — And Hasn't — Covered Tara Reade's Allegation"

Thurs 4/28

Review session for final assignment

Week 15: Final Week

Tues 5/3: Trust and false belief

C Thi Nguyen, "Escape the echo chamber" in *Aeon*

Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust, and the Epistemology of Prejudice"

***** Final paper due 5/14 *****