

# PROFESSIONAL DEONTOLOGY

DEGREE COURSE YEAR: Third

1º SEMESTER ☒ 2º SEMESTER ☐  
CATEGORY: ☐ BASIC ☒ COMPULSORY ☐ OPTIONAL  
NO. OF CREDITS (ECTS): 3  
LANGUAGE: English

TUTORIALS: Available, following IE University schedules and practices

FORMAT: Attending Classroom

PREREQUISITES: Journalism face, as current events show, ethical dilemmas with moral implications that make it necessary to be trained for the exercise of this job following high moral standards. They will be essential to claim a way of doing journalism that is rigorous, independent, committed to truth and adhered to principles and values that fuel their credibility. Professional Deontology is part of the essence of this profession. Only a moral and critical training will enable us to analyze facts around us to provide that service to society so questioned lately.

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## 1- SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

Ethics is part of the essence of Journalism; therefore, standards and codes of values constantly permeate the work of the different professionals willing to defend the credibility of this profession. Ethics and professional ethics includes knowledge of a set of principles that provide the framework for reflection, reasoning through continuous response to the dilemmas faced by the journalist's relationship with readers, viewers or listeners, self regulation of the media and legislation.

## 2- OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

Students will become familiar with the basic ethical concepts of neutrality, responsibility, independence, pluralism and objectivity, which are the base of professional ethics through case studies on recent cases of the reality and other cases that made history. They will learn about the ethical codes of the mainstream media and the rules used by these media of reference for the proper practice of journalism. This will allow, at the end of the course, to have the tools necessary to respond to the challenges posed to this job in a changing and globalized environment.

### **3- CONTENT**

#### **Session 1— Presentation**

Jeremy Bentham the British philosopher, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, wrote in 1826 that "Ethics has received the more expressive name of deontology." Since then, however, the word has not been used much, in relation to media at least. All Latin tongues make good use of it, to describe professional ethics, as opposed to personal ethics. Deontology is not about good and evil, virtue and sin: it is about serving the public well or not.

Ethics is the concern of the individual journalist. Deontology is the concern of the journalistic profession. In virtually every country, unions and associations have adopted codes of conduct.

#### **Session 2**

Ethics, Law and Good Practice

Journalistic Deontology teaches the ethical principles willingly assumed by the professionals of journalism on the basis of integrity, professionalism and social responsibility. Only these principles allow journalists to preserve the free flow of information necessary to the society as a whole. These norms related to the professional behavior should be considered mandatory to members of a profession.

The principal function of journalism is to truthfully inform its audiences about facts and events. Obviously this is the general rule, but in practice this principle is often neglected or ignored.

It is necessary to outline that the concept of being a journalist has evolved as a consequence of social, cultural, political and technological changes, and because of the evolution of the nature of information itself and the related practices of distributing information.

As a matter of fact, the concept of journalism is strictly linked to the diffusion of information (or news), which is a fundamental public service.

Today the most complex and difficult issue to handle is the practical confusion that often exists between journalism and public relations; this becomes problematic if we take into account that a good number of activities of the latter also require media diffusion. This confusion creates difficulties in setting up ethical and deontological borders between journalism on the one hand, and public relations on the other hand.

#### **Session 3**

Ethics Handbook. From Journalism Handbooks to the newsroom.

The mechanisms of self-regulation: the deontological codes, the style books, the statutes of the editorial staff, the ombudsmen, the readers' representational organizations and the news councils.

They have two main objectives:

Promote specific moral values in relation to media content, and to facilitate ways that allow claiming and requiring that this content respects these values and norms;

Its functioning and effectiveness are a result of the free initiatives and voluntary engagement of those who intervene in mediated communication, namely owners and media managers.

Infotainment is rampant. The idea has faded that news media should be a public service first and a business only second.

In the present environment, worldwide, an individual reporter can evidently do little to fight these ugly trends. Reference Publications with high standards such as *The New York Times*, *El País* in Spain or *The Guardian* in the U. K. should serve as models but rather stand out as exceptions. The journalistic profession could do much if it developed a sense of solidarity to promote knowledge and progress.

#### **Session 4**

Joachim Fest. An Ethical Journalist. Memoirs of a German journalist.

A great journalist recalls the ethical lesson his father gave him in the worst scenario: Nazi Germany

The German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* publisher, was somehow an outsider, a figure from another world. His memoirs of childhood and youth, are an invitation to reflection.

In April 1933, shortly before he entered school, his father, a headmaster of a Berlin school lost his job without notice. He would later be banned from all professional activities. Their mother, demoralized by restrictions and hopelessness, pleaded with her husband to consider joining the NSDAP, the Nazi party. Their father persevered in his refusal against Nazism. To his elder sons Wolfgang and Joachim, he dictated a sentence from the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Etiam si omnes – ego non!" (Everyone else may go along: Not I). Hence the title of his memoirs: "Ich nicht."

#### **Session 5**

Infotainment

Noisy sports publications. Facts should be sacred also in the entertainment media.

No gossiping, please!

#### **Session 6**

Ethics & Advertisement

Blurred boundaries

#### **Session 7**

[Clarification for drafts proposal from students].

Credibility. Veracity, Rumors and Beta versions

Journalistic truth means something different online from what it previously meant, and whether it's appropriate to essentially discard traditional standards of verification.

We now encourage rumors that editors either hadn't checked out or actually disbelieved. Online news represents a new species of journalism, both more widely participatory and more frankly tentative. A beta version, unfinished software released only to solicit improvements. Publishing falsehoods is cheap, since you don't have to pay anybody for the laborious work of verification, which used to be integral to journalism. The mandate to get news online first, and the acceptability of posting unverified, incomplete versions, has become widely standard practice.

Why being first is so important, when readers again and again claim that they want news sources that have credibility, which they can believe and trust.

Current cases in the international media.

## **Session 8**

Privacy and Protection of Honor.

Balancing between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy

## **Session 9**

Accountability.

The rise of anonymous comment. When news organizations went online, scrupulous insistence on authentication fell away. Papers bought into the idea that robust discourse required anonymity, that people were entitled, indeed had the right, to make whatever comment they liked without having to identify themselves.

Some news organizations are claiming that anonymous posters deserve the same protection as confidential sources-that people who comment online on a news report are deserving of the same consideration as vulnerable sources who might have been relied on in compiling that report.

Difference between a source whose identity the reporter knows and has agreed to conceal, and a source whose identity is known to nobody.

## **Session 10**

Ethical Ways to Craft an Article.

In communication the aim of ethics is, in a word, accountability.

Being-ethical-means-being-accountable. Emphasizes ethics as a process, not an outcome

## **Session 11**

Decoding DSK, did they have all the data?

The missing witness and a real victim.

Lawyers and information.

The O J Simpson case.

Famous sport women, pregnant and presumed guilty?

## Session 12

Plagiarism & Fabrication.

If systemic plagiarism is occurring is because it has become much easier to do ...

The Classics Case of Plagiarism in recent American Journalism.

How Ben Bradley suffered Janet Cooke who became infamous when it was discovered that a Pulitzer Prize-winning story that she had written for *The Washington Post* had been fabricated. A staff reporter for *The New York Times* committed frequent acts of journalistic fraud while covering significant news events. The widespread fabrication and plagiarism represent a profound betrayal of trust and a low point in the 152-year history of the newspaper. The reporter, Jayson Blair, 27, misled readers and *Times* colleagues with dispatches that purported to be from Maryland, Texas and other states, when often he was far away, in New York. He fabricated comments. He concocted scenes. He lifted material from other newspapers and wire services.

## Session 13

Newspapers, Politicians and Police in London.

Journalism is going through a good moment if we accept that the scandal rocking the empire of Rupert Murdoch, the most powerful media group in the world, has discovered, news by news, week after week, for two years, by *The Guardian*. *The Guardian*, with 190 years, has defeated the *News of the World* that appeared every week for 168 years. The press, politicians and police, the three P's, are at stake. The practice of journalism, unscrupulous criminal, has been the cause that has caused strong shaking in the relations among politicians, journalists and police. It is good what is happening in London. It's a warning that relations between journalists, politicians and policemen are not a crony of exchange of favors and information, especially if crimes are part of the deal.

## Session 14

Threats to Ethical Journalism in the Digital Era.

People used to care more about right and wrong, and journalism used to be more honest and more dedicated. Technological innovation in the communications field gives rise to outsized expectations of social transformation. As they said television would eliminate illiteracy and turn every living room into a classroom; now we hear that the Internet would universalize knowledge and destroy the corrupt priesthoods built on informational monopolies.

These examples of unfulfilled prophecies remind us that technologies by themselves do nothing but offer a range of possibilities.

Now blogging, typically involves casual, undisclosed, incorporation of observed actions and overheard quotes with a consistent refusal to think about one of the things ethics people worry most about: The problem of harm. Who's hurt, is the harm necessary, can it be avoided, can it be minimized?

The invasion of the private space. The aggressive desire to be relevant online. The uncritical acceptance of online norms as constituting an ethically appropriate revision of journalistic standards.

What about the standards of veracity? And about accountability and anonymity?

Is it only a problem for journalist the rise of amateur and part-time journalists?

## Session 15

Deontology in the Digital Age.

How can they use the new media tools responsibly?

New current cases *versus* old stories. Old bad habits *versus* good practices.

Closing remarks and conclusions.

Clarifications for final essay and exam.

## 4- METHODOLOGY AND ECTS WEIGHTING

The subject of Professional Journalistic Deontology and ethics will always be part of the future publications of the current students. The learning method will be based primarily on analysis of cases set for each of the themes and the subsequent discussions. Theoretical background will support to the exercise of journalism. Students will not only be limited to study issues relating to ethical dilemmas faced by journalists in their daily work, but will put into practice the knowledge acquired in other subjects to discuss ethics with media managers, advocates of the reader journalists, etc. This material was developed reports and pieces of audio or video. This will tap the resources of MediaLab and provide content for virtual platforms.

3 credits ECTS (3 x 25 h/credit = 75 working hours by the student)					
Activities	Class hours	Sessions	Personal working hours	Total Hours	ECTS
Classes	12	9		12	0.48
Seminars & debates	7	4		7	0.28
Study, reading, videos	3	2	48	51	2.04
Practical works			5	5	0.2
Other activities					
Tutorials					
Exams					
Total	22	15	53	75	3

## 5- EVALUATION SYSTEM

### 5.1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

While this subject usually has a heavy theoretical component, the sessions will follow a path of case analysis. Thus, participation in the reflections arising out of exposure of these will be assessed on an ongoing basis.

## **5.2. EVALUATION AND WEIGHTING CRITERIA**

Class participation, discussion and reflections: 30%

Final Project: 35%

Final exam: 35%

July extraordinary evaluation: will need the mandatory essay, with the exam.

Each student can take 4 exams per subject in 2 consecutive courses.

It is mandatory to attend 70% of the classes. Students who do not comply with this percentage of attendance lose the 1st and second exams and go directly to the 3rd one.

Grading for the students on make-up exams will be subject to the following rules:

- Those students who failed the subject in the first round of exams, pass to the 2nd session, except those who do not comply with the percentage of attendance to class and go directly to the 3rd session.
- The maximum grade that a student may obtain in the 2nd exam session is 8.