

Journalism Law, Ethics – JOUR 206
University of Richmond
Department of Journalism
Spring, 2022

Who? Shahan Mufti

When? Monday and Wednesday – 12:00 p.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Where? Weinstein Hall 303

Email: smufti@richmond.edu

Office: 425 Weinstein Hall

Office hours: By appointment

Note: Since the COVID pandemic is still going strong, we might occasionally have to meet online on Zoom. In that case, please note that I maintain a no recording policy. One of the hallmarks of a University of Richmond education is small classes where faculty and students engage in robust discussions. The goal is always to encourage students with varied perspectives to be heard respectfully. In the department of journalism classrooms, we frequently discuss and debate the latest events and issues in the news that often affect our own lives in the current moment. Recognizing all this, professors in Journalism will not be recording our classroom sessions. Students are also prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part or captured images of the class during a Zoom session or images of students or faculty in the course. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the deans of Arts and Sciences as well as Westhampton and Richmond College with the possibility of sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, do not hesitate to contact the professor to discuss them.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course about journalistic decision-making. Why do journalists make decisions that they do? How do they make those decisions? Whose interests do they serve? What is at stake? The conduct of journalists is governed from outside the profession by laws that have great, albeit sporadic and inconsistent, influence. Journalism is molded much more by forces within the profession. Sometimes these are institutional codes of ethics or conduct. More often, they are individual journalists' ideas of right and wrong. This course will explore the legal and ethical ideas that shape and guide the work of journalists through all stages of the journalistic process and in several subfields of the profession.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, you will have a thorough understanding of the American legal system as it applies to journalists and the news media. You will understand key theoretical concepts in ethical decision-making and apply them to the journalism that you consume and create. Through mock trials and other analytical assignments, you will understand common legal and ethical challenges faced by journalists and other media professionals. In short, you will be equipped with the knowledge to begin tackling the everyday professional challenges of journalism. To be successful in this course, expect to devote an average of 10-14 hours each week to preparing for class, participating in class sessions, studying course related materials, and completing course assignments.

READINGS

- “The Law of Public Communication,” (11th Edition) by Kent R. Middleton and William E. Lee, (2020)
- Book chapters, articles and web-links will be available on Blackboard

A note on case studies: In this course, we will routinely examine and explore case studies built around topics that may be sensitive for some students. While almost everything is taken from popular news and media sources and would be part of a routine news consumption, there may be a particular topics that you may feel like avoiding out of concern of your own wellbeing. This is a completely reasonable urge. Do not feel obliged to engage with a case study if you feel that doing so will harm you. Please send me a note of warning to make me aware that you did not do a specific reading so I do not prompt you for a response during class discussion. If a case study in a graded assignment includes material that you have difficulty engaging with, please contact me to work out an alternate plan/ assignment.

ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation: 20 percent

Active participation is essential for you to do well in this course. You will need to do the readings and assignments to follow the theoretical and practical concepts that are key to understanding the issues in this course. You are also required to closely follow local, national and international news by reading newspapers, news magazine and news websites. A dynamic classroom, with exchange of fresh and original ideas, questions and criticisms, will allow us all to extract most from the course. All students are expected to attend all class sessions.

Presentation: 20 percent of your final score

Once during the semester, a pair or small group of you will conduct a full class session. In this session, you and your partner/s will pick a particular set of news coverage from the previous two-week period and use it to discuss legal and ethical issues that are essential to our course.

You will be evaluated on: 1) the depth and sophistication of your analysis; 2) the amount of knowledge of the course material that you exhibit; 3) your clarity, organization and creativity in conducting the session. Each group will typically be awarded a single grade, but I may choose to assign individual grades in case I sense unequal contributions by group members.

Mock Trial: 25 percent

Mock Trial: 25 percent of your final score

We will conduct two mock trial during this course. Each student will participate in at least one of these mock trials. The purpose of the mock trials is to test and debate the laws we study in class by applying them to real or imaginary legal cases. Two groups of students representing opposing sides will be assigned to each case. Members of each group will play different roles – lawyers, witnesses, and experts – to demonstrate how the law might be interpreted in their favor in the mock trial. Detailed instructions will be emailed out to each group before their trial. In the mock trial, you will be evaluated and graded on three basic elements: 1) the depth and sophistication of the legal arguments; 2) your exhibited knowledge of the course material; and 3) your clarity and creativity in performance. Each

group will typically be awarded a single grade, but I may choose to assign individual grades in case I sense unequal contributions by group members.

Judicial Opinion: 5 percent of your final score

At the conclusion of the mock trial in which you serve as a juror, you will be required write a legal opinion in which you decide the case in favor of one party or another. In this opinion, you will explain how and why you reached that decision.

Final Exams: 30 percent

The final exam will be a take-home exam distributed towards the end of the semester.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES

- Presentation #1: Wednesday, 2/9
- Presentation #2: Wednesday, 2/16
- Presentation #3: Wednesday, 3/2
- Presentation #4: Wednesday, 3/23
- Presentation #5: Wednesday, 3/30
- Presentation #6: Wednesday, 4/6

- Mock trial #1: Monday, 2/28 and Wednesday 3/2
- Mock trial #2: Monday 4/11 and Wednesday 4/13

Final exam deadline: Friday, 4/29 at 5 p.m.

WRITING GUIDELINES

You are required to meet all deadlines on the syllabus without exception. If you foresee trouble meeting a deadline you must inform me at least one week before the date and we will discuss whether an extension might be useful or possible. A late submission without any warning will not be read and will receive an “F” grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Observe the honor code. You need to cite all the sources you use (including those that we are reading for this class) in any written assignments. You must include citations whenever you quote someone or simply paraphrase his or her idea. You may use any style for citations as long as you are consistent.

All work submitted should be done by you in preparation for this specific course. (You may not, for example, hand in a paper for this class that you are also preparing for another course). Evidence of plagiarism or cheating of any kind will result in an “F” on the assignment and an incident may be reported to the university administration for further consideration. If you have difficulty understanding how to cite sources or have questions concerning any of the above, contact the professor immediately.

No recording policy: Once again, students are prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part or captured images of the class during a Zoom session or images of students or faculty in the course. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the deans of

Arts and Sciences as well as Westhampton and Richmond College. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, do not hesitate to contact the professor to discuss them.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

Students with disabilities who have been formally granted accommodations by a University of Richmond Disability Advisor must show their "Disability Accommodation Notice" to me within the first week of the academic term. The student and I will agree upon an accommodation in advance for each scheduled major assignment. You must meet with me at least one week prior to any deadline to discuss your accommodation.

READING SCHEDULE

FUNDAMENTALS

WEEK 1 – Introduction/ syllabus

1/10 - Introductions

WEEK 2 – The first amendment

1/17 – MLK day – NO CLASS

1/19 – Middleton & Lee Ch. 2

WEEK 3 – Function of the law

1/24 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 1

WEEK 4 –Ethics

1/31 - "Ethical Foundations and Perspectives" from "Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning" by Clifford G. Christians et al. (posted on Blackboard)

REPORTING

WEEK 5 – Gathering Information – Access

2/7 - Middleton & Lee 11 and p. 183-203

WEEK 6 – Gathering Information - Sources

2/14 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 12

WEEK 7 – Reporting the Law

2/21 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 10

WEEK 8 – Mock Trial #1

WEEK 9 – SPRING BREAK

WRITING AND PRODUCTION

WEEK 10 – Copyright and intellectual property

3/14 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 6

WEEK 11 – Regulation and Censorship

3/21 – Middleton & Lee Ch. 3

WEEK 12 – Review

3/28 – No new Reading/ Extra credit film

IN THE PUBLIC REALM

WEEK 13 – Mock Trial #2

WEEK 14 – Libel

4/11 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 4

WEEK 15 – Privacy

4/18 – Middleton & Lee Ch. 5

Final exam due on Friday, 5/3 at 5 p.m.
