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Office hours: Thursday 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The conduct of journalists is governed from outside the profession by legal codes that have great, albeit sporadic and inconsistent, impact. A far more frequent influence is exerted from within the profession, sometimes by institutional codes of ethics, and more often by individual journalists' ideas of right and wrong. This course will explore these legal and ethical forces that shape and guide the work of journalists. We will examine state and federal laws regulating journalists and others who exercise free expression. We'll learn how these laws have developed over the years and about the varying interpretations of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that have given rise to many of these laws. We will also explore how professional decisions are made by journalists and the ethical boundaries they draw to stay within legal confines, live up to the ideals of the profession, and serve the public and its best interests.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To be successful in this course, you should 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. By the end of the semester you will have complete basic knowledge 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.

READINGS

• Book chapters, articles and web-links will be available on Blackboard
ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

News quizzes: 10 percent
You will routinely be tested in class on details from major local, national and international news stories, as well as from the Middleton and Lee textbook.

Participation: 10 percent
Attendance and active participation are essential for you to do well in this course. In addition to maintaining a strong handle on all the theoretical and practical issues of journalism being discussed in class, you will also be required to keep abreast of local, national and international news by reading newspapers, news magazine and news websites. A dynamic classroom will allow all members to extract most benefit from the course with the exchange of fresh ideas, questions and criticisms. You are required to attend all class sessions. For every three sessions that you miss, your final grade will drop by one letter grade.

Mock Trial: 25 percent
Three times during the course we will conduct a mock trial in class. 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 a legal case. 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 particular case. Detailed instructions will be mailed out to each group before their trial.

In the mock trial, you will be evaluated and graded as a group 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. Any members of the group that is unable to contribute meaningfully to the assignment may be assessed and graded separate from their group.

Media ethics exercise: 25 percent
Once during the semester, you will be required to report and produce a news story from the college campus or the city of Richmond. You will then present your work to your colleagues in a class presentation and discuss at least three separate moment of ethical decision-making you encountered and tackled in the course of reporting or producing your story. You will be graded on both your new story and the presentation.

You will be graded on your stories according to the following standard (as published by the Poynter Institute):
A: Publishable in current form with few or no revisions
A-/B+: Publishable with minor work
B: Solid elements; will be publishable with some rehabbing
B-/C+: Some serious flaws but other strengths; will be publishable with reasonable work
C: Major flaws; needs overhaul before being publishable
D: Critical errors; could not be considered publishable without dramatic change
F: Work not completed, lacks merit over-all, was late, or misspelled a personal or business name.

In your ethics presentations, you will be evaluated on: 1) the depth and sophistication of your analysis; 2) your exhibited knowledge of the course material; and 3) your clarity and organization.
Final Exams: 30 percent
The final exam will be a take-home exam distributed towards the end of the semester.

IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES
Ethics exercise #1: 9/20, 9/22
Mock trial #1: Thursday, 10/6
Ethics exercise #2: 10/25, 10/27
Mock trial #2: Thursday, 11/3
Mock trial #3: Tuesday, 11/25
Final paper deadline: Thursday, 12/8 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.

On the first page of each assignment, in the upper left corner, please list your name, a one or two word title description, the date and the word count. This can all be done in the “header” space on a Microsoft Word document.

Example: Richards — reporting ethics – 10/16/14 – 105 words
Please include page numbers at the bottom of each page. Include your name in the title of the Word document.

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 this 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 me immediately.

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.
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

THE BASICS

WEEK 1 – The First Amendment
Aug. 23 - Introduction to the course and between participants
Aug. 25 - Read: Middleton & Lee Ch. 2

WEEK 2 – Legal and Ethical Foundations
Aug. 30 - Read: Middleton & Lee Ch. 1
Sep. 1 - “Ethical Foundations and Perspectives” from "Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning" by Clifford G. Christians et al. (posted on Blackboard)

REPORTING

WEEK 3 – Gathering Information – Sources
Sep. 6 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 11
Sep. 8 - Ethics case (on Blackboard)

WEEK 4 – Gathering Information - Records
Sep. 13 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 12
Sep. 15 - Ethics case (on Blackboard)

WEEK 5 – Ethics Presentation #1
Sep. 20 - Post your Stories before 9 a.m. on 9/19
Sep. 22 - Post your Stories before 9 a.m. on 9/19

WEEK 6 – Spotlight on Whistleblowers
Sep. 27 - Readings on Blackboard
Sep. 29 - Readings on Blackboard

WEEK 7 – Unusual reporting methods
Oct. 4 – Immersion Journalism - Readings on Blackboard
Oct. 6 - FIRST MOCK TRIAL

WRITING AND PRODUCTION

WEEK 8 – Copyright and intellectual property
Oct. 11 - FALL BREAK
Oct. 13 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 6

WEEK 9 – Prior Restraints and Other Controls
Oct. 18 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 3
Oct. 20 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 10
WEEK 10 – Ethics Presentation #2  
Oct. 25 - Post your Stories before 9 a.m. on 10/24  
Oct. 27 - Post your Stories before 9 a.m. on 10/24

WEEK 11 – Presidential Election 2016  
Nov. 1 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 7  
Nov. 3 - SECOND MOCK TRIAL

IN THE PUBLIC REALM

WEEK 12 – Libel  
Nov. 8 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 4  
Nov. 10 - Ethics case (on Blackboard)

WEEK 13 – Privacy  
Nov. 15 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 5  
Nov. 17 - Ethics case (on Blackboard)

WEEK 14  
Nov. 22 - THIRD MOCK TRIAL  
**Nov. 24 - THANKSGIVING BREAK**

WEEK 15 – Wrap-up  
Nov. 28 - Readings on Blackboard  
Dec. 1 - Readings on Blackboard

**Final paper due on 12/8 at 5 p.m. via email**