

Journalism 303, Ethics and Law - Spring, 2008

WF 7:50-9:05 a.m. SPB 217

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Office hours: Monday-Wednesday 10:30-1:30 or by appointment

Please do not arrive late to class, and if you are late, don't come in. It's distracting to others. Just go home, get some sleep, and try harder next time.

COURSE OF STUDY

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, always by individual journalists' ideas of what the rules of the game should be.

This course will examine current state and federal laws regulating journalists, how they have shifted in recent years, and the varying interpretations of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that have given rise to these laws.

During the second half of the semester, we will focus on a series of ethical questions that commonly confront journalists, including those occasions when legal and ethical prescriptions diverge.

The law texts are *Major Principles of Media Law* by Wayne Overbeck, and some emailed readings.

When you are reading Overbeck, along with other notes keep two lists: one for legal terms and their definitions. Overbeck usually, and helpfully, puts legal terms in italics. The second list is of each of the legal cases cited in a list you'll be given, the court that heard the case, the date, and the "rule" for journalists that emerged from it.

The ethics text is *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and The Public Should Expect*, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel

The midterm exam's oral component is scheduled for Friday, March 7. Make your travel arrangements now! The final exam will be a take-home exam.

You are expected to attend each class, and you are responsible to find out what you have missed in any class you cannot attend. Take careful notes on all material presented in class, in whatever form: lectures, discussions, videotapes, etc. No credit will be given for homework turned in past deadline, and no make-up quizzes will be given unless you have a legitimate and verifiable excuse.

All homework must be emailed before the deadlines. All proper nouns in written assignments will be followed by a check mark indicating that you have double-checked for proper spelling. Each misspelled proper name will cost one letter grade. You'll be allowed to rewrite it for a later deadline if you wish, and the two grades will be averaged.

Grades are determined by your performance on papers, quizzes, tests, and class participation. Class participation consists of informed discussion, thoughtful responses to legal and ethical case studies, knowledgeable class questions and faithful attendance.

Final grades will be derived from the following items--points are approximate and subject to revision:

Class participation	10 points
Quizzes, homework, exercises	40 points
Midterm law exam	25 points
Final ethics paper	25 points

92-99 percent is an A; 90-91 A-; 88-89 B+; 82-87 B, etc.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work, words, ideas or data as your own. It's plagiarism whether you use a whole document, a paragraph, a single sentence, a distinctive phrase, specific data, or a graphic element of any kind without attribution or acknowledgement of the source. It's also plagiarism if you use an idea developed by another as if it were your own. If you use any work created by someone else as your own without acknowledging the creator, and if you hand in the work -- whether it is a news story or a research paper -- with your name on it, thus implying that it is your work, then you commit plagiarism. On the other hand, when you carefully acknowledge your sources, you demonstrate the range and depth of your research and reporting.

-- *Adapted from the Virginia Tech English Department's statement on plagiarism:*
"Wonder Where They Got It?"

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