Journalism Law, Ethics – JOUR 303
University of Richmond
Department of Journalism
Spring, 2019
Tuesday and Thursday – 9:00 p.m. to 10:15 p.m.
Weinstein Hall 305

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Office hours: Tuesday 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 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 within the
profession, sometimes exerted by institutional codes of ethics, and more often by individual
journalists' ideas of right and wrong. This course will explore such legal and ethical forces
that shape and guide the work of journalists. We will examine local and federal laws
regulating journalists and others who exercise free expression. We will 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

What can the news media do? What should they do? What should a journalist not do? What
must a journalist do? This course give you the ability to think about how to answer such
questions. 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. 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

Lee, (2017)
• Book chapters, articles and web-links will be available on Blackboard
ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation: 20 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 concepts 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. If you end the semester with a perfect attendance record, you will receive extra credit for the course.

Mock Trial: 30 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. Each group is awarded a single grade, but any members of the group that is apparently unable to contribute meaningfully to the assignment may be assessed and graded separate from their group.

Presentation: 20 percent
Once during the semester, a pair of you will have the opportunity to conduct a full class session. In this session, you and your partners will pick particular news coverage from various mediums over the previous two-week period, and use it to discuss topics and issues that are relevant to our course material. You are expected to tackle both legal and ethical dimensions of journalism in these sessions.

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; and 4) your ability to stir group discussion.

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: Thursday, 1/31
Presentation #2: Thursday, 2/7
Presentation #3: Thursday, 2/14
Presentation #4: Thursday, 2/21
Presentation #5: Thursday, 3/7
Presentation #6: Thursday, 3/21
Presentation #7: Thursday, 4/4
Presentation #8: Thursday, 4/11
Mock trial #1: Thursday, 2/28
Mock trial #2: Thursday, 3/28
Mock trial #3: Thursday, 4/18
Final exam deadline: Friday, 5/3 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 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
Jan. 15 - Introduction
Jan. 17 - Read: Middleton & Lee Ch. 2

WEEK 2 – Legal and Ethical Foundations
Jan. 22 - Read: Middleton & Lee Ch. 1
Jan. 24 - “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 – Access
Jan. 29 - Middleton & Lee 12 and p. 183-203
Jan. 31 – Presentation #1

WEEK 4 – Gathering Information - Sources
Feb. 5 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 11
Feb. 7 – Presentation #2

WEEK 5 – The Courts
Feb. 12 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 10
Feb. 14 - Presentation #3

WEEK 6 – Leaks and Whistleblowing
Feb. 19 - Readings on Blackboard
Feb. 21 – Presentation #4

WEEK 7 – Unusual and Unconventional Reporting Methods
Feb. 26 –Readings on Blackboard
Feb. 28 – Mock Trial #1

WRITING AND PRODUCTION

WEEK 8 – Copyright and intellectual property
Mar. 5 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 6
Mar. 7 - Presentation #5

WEEK 9 – SPRING BREAK
Mar. 12 – No class
Mar. 14 – No class
WEEK 10 – Prior Restraints and Other Controls
Mar. 19 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 3
Mar. 21 - Presentation #6

WEEK 11 – Covering Politics
Mar. 26 – Middleton & Lee Ch. 7
Mar. 28 – Mock Trial #2

IN THE PUBLIC REALM

WEEK 12 – Libel
Apr. 2 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 4
Apr. 4 – Presentation #7

WEEK 13 – Privacy
Apr. 9 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 5
Apr. 11 – Presentation #8

WEEK 14 – Sex and Violence
Apr. 16 - Middleton & Lee Ch. 9
Apr. 18 – Mock Trial #3

WEEK 15 – Wrap-up
Apr. 23 – Presentation #8
Apr. 25 – Wrap-up

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