

*Carolyn Nielsen*  
**Journalism 351: *Mass Media Ethics***

**Syllabus**

“The purpose of sound ethical reasoning is to draw responsible conclusions that yield justifiable actions.”

Clifford Christians, *Media Ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning*

JOUR 351  
4 credits  
Tu/Thu noon-1:50 p.m.

**INSTRUCTOR:** Prof. Carolyn Nielsen

**REQUIRED TEXT:** Lee Wilkins and Clifford D. Christians, *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*, Taylor & Francis, 2009.

**RECOMMENDED:** *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. This is a guide for APA style, commonly used for scholarly research. You may buy the book, borrow it from the library or use a credible Web resource such as:  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

**DESCRIPTION:** Introduction to ethical theories; examination of professional codes and standards' changing roles of the media that affect moral reasoning for the journalist; responsibilities of the media in a world of instant communication and reaction; historical perspectives through case studies; use of reporting, editing and advocacy methods and formation of news in print, broadcast and online media. Prerequisite: JOUR 207. **Beginning in fall 2009, this class has changed from 3 to 4 credits and a research paper is now required.**

**OBJECTIVES:** Learn to recognize ethical issues and evaluate them using established theories to reach justifiable (although not uniform) conclusions. Understand institutional and external pressures faced by working professionals. Gain deeper understanding of the role and responsibility of mass media in a diverse society. Understand what it means to be an ethical journalist or public relations professional. Develop a grounding in ethical theory that will enable you to navigate new technological platforms as they emerge.

**METHOD:** We will begin by examining ethical theories and models as well as historical changes and challenges to journalistic norms and practices. We will use case studies to explore how theories apply to real-world situations and can affect outcomes. Further, we will examine the

rapidly changing world of the news media and explore questions posed by emerging technologies. This course will focus on visual journalism, public relations and news media.

**RELEVANCE:**

With freedom of the press comes responsibility to sources, to society and to the practice of journalism and public relations. Ethical situations rarely have a right or wrong answer. By examining and understanding theories and decision-making models developed to analyze ethical dilemmas, we are able to make justifiable decisions.

**GRADING:**

10 % Participation in class, reading quizzes, attendance  
30% Responses worth 10% each (2 papers, 1 presentation)  
25% Essay  
35% Research paper- ethics audit

Your grade is based on your ability to demonstrate critical thinking when evaluating issues, to take a point of view and clearly communicate it, to openly explore other points of view and to back up your perspective with relevant examples and well-formed reasoning. There are not right or wrong answers. However, there is a strong difference between an opinion justified with a well-reasoned response grounded in a historical or philosophical perspective and someone saying, "That's just not right." Quality work clearly expresses WHY. As always, quality writing counts.

Arriving on time and prepared for class, meeting deadlines and engaging positively with others in discussion are the hallmarks of solid participation.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

You will be given detailed specifications for each assignment. This is a brief overview.

**Response paper/presentation:** These will be responses to case studies assigned in class. The paper will be three pages (min.) and provide students the opportunity to practice reasoning through a question and making a decision. The presentations will have the same objective, but will be done orally in class with teams of three.

**The essay** involves choosing a book from the list provided, reading it and writing a four-page critical analysis of the work and how it was received.

**The research paper** is based on an ethics audit of newspapers. You will examine news content (may include visuals) and apply ethical principals to the issue you choose to study. Students interested in PR may choose to do a content analysis of a particular PR ethics case and how it was covered in the news. It will be helpful to you to choose your topic early and begin early as this paper is an important part of your grade and deserves your best effort. The paper should be a minimum of eight pages.

**EXPECTATIONS**

This is a seminar course, which means most of our time is spent in discussion with one another. You benefit from that discussion and your classmates benefit from your contributions. Attendance is vital to success.

This course develops sequentially, so it is imperative to stay on top of your work and meet deadlines. Every day a paper is late results in a 20% drop in your grade.

**COPY PREPARATION**

Your response paper and essay should be in news format. Your research paper will require APA style. Your papers should be stapled with your last name in the upper left-hand corner of each page. Always proofread your work before submission. You will be marked down for spelling, grammatical or factual errors.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Journalists and public-relations professionals who lose their integrity have lost everything. All of your work should be original with works and sources properly cited and attributed. Plagiarism, unapproved collaboration, quoting without attribution and copying off the Internet are serious violations and could result in you failing the course or even more serious consequences at the university level. Ignorance is not an excuse. As university students, you need to know how to properly attribute and credit. If you have any questions about this, please contact me or refer to the WWU Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedures.

**RESPECT:**

We can all learn from one another when the classroom atmosphere is one of a learning community. We achieve that by showing respect for one another, especially when personal differences are at issue. The university setting is one in which new ideas and perspectives are openly explored.

We honor diversity in all of its many facets. That includes both the classroom atmosphere and any need for assistance or accommodation, which should be addressed to the Office of Student Life at x3844.