

med newsletter

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

BY TOM BIVINS, NEWSLETTER EDITOR



At a faculty party at my house some years ago, a younger colleague asked me when in my life I had decided to become a college teacher. I briefly reflected on my eclectic career in media over a 20-year period: radio and television journalism (six years of which were in the military... think *Good Morning Vietnam* here), documentary film making, corporate public relations, advertising, and even editorial cartooning. All of this before I finally hit on teaching as my ultimate goal. At least that's what I said at the time.

My wife, whom I had met in high school, quickly corrected me—as she is wont to do. She noted that under my senior photograph in the East Anchorage High School yearbook (which she produced from off my home office library shelf) was a brief list of my various scholastic and athletic achievements: French Club, 1 year; Drama Club, 1 year; Swim Club, 2 years; Football, 3 years... (Not exactly an over-achiever). But, more surprisingly was the yearbook-required, wild guess at our future life goal. Mine read, “teacher.”

Funny how things work out. As I wandered through my media career, I was also going to school, pretty much all the time. When I finally was educated enough to actually teach a class (creative writing—via my MFA degree), I discovered a new love. My first class was for the Chapman College extension on a military base in Anchorage, Alaska. My students were all military, not a lot older than most college seniors, but with an entirely different life experience and attitude. I loved it. Various writing assignments helped me understand who they were and why they were motivated to get a college degree.

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med newsletter
MEDIA ETHICS DIVISION

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I'll never forget an assignment exploring their most important life experience to date. Keep in mind that most of these students were still in their 20s. One student had written of an experience he had had as an Air Force fire fighter during a fire at an on-base housing complex. He had saved the life of a two-year-old child. He marked that act as the most momentous event of his young life to date. I often wonder how many such experiences he has had since then. I was clearly hooked.

Just to prove that not all teaching is equal in uplifting experiences, my next class—this time at the University of Alaska, Anchorage—was freshman composition. I won't go into the encouraging lessons I learned in that class, but it didn't dampen my desire to change my life direction to teaching, full time.

My new track led me through a Ph.D. program that prepared me to teach what I had done professionally for years: TV production. That led me to a job teaching that, and thanks to a small line on my tiny CV about having worked in corporate PR, to a 15-year career teaching public relations. Hanging studio lights from a 30-foot ladder got old after awhile. And, because early on I had decided to focus on PR ethics as a research agenda, I ended up teaching "Journalism Ethics" as part of my schedule at Oregon.

It all worked out, as things often do. Teaching has become my life, as I "predicted" (and my wife reminded me of) all those years ago in my high-school year book.

Tom

WHY DO YOU TEACH MEDIA ETHICS

BY ERIN SCHAUSTER, DIVISION HEAD



We have the best job in academia. Call me naïve. And sure, I'm biased. But we have a great job.

We get to spark moral imagination in our students and teach critical thinking and problem solving. We impact their moral awareness so

that when they start working as journalists, public relations practitioners and advertising executives, they know to reflect on the moral nature of important decisions, to stop and ask, "Wait a minute, what are my options, whom does this impact and what's the right thing to do?"

Will students learn this behavior without our help? Maybe.

But we also know that role models are important to learning and adopting new behavior. It happens on the job and in the classroom. Leaders of organizations shape and

reinforce ethical culture, and ethics education in college impacts the development of our students' moral reasoning. We serve as ethical role models for our students. Of course, MED members know this. It's why we teach media ethics in courses such as media law and ethics, offer ethics-based electives, and dedicate days and weeks to the topic in our other courses. Still, it's important to have a reminder every now and again, and this newsletter serves as that reminder.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the MED Newsletter dedicated to the topic of teaching media ethics. And I want to remind you to visit and contribute to our [teaching ethics resources site](#) and thank you for the contributions you've made through the years, by writing a newsletter post, presenting education research at AEJMC, serving as a panelist and inspiring the next generation of media professionals.



MEDIA ETHICS: THE BEST TEACHER IS EXPERIENCE

BY NICOLE KRAFT, PF&R CHAIR

“Media ethics are the gift that keep on giving, as there is no shortage of opportunity to learn from mistakes of others.”



You might recall [the story published in this newsletter](#) of a young woman whose life was ruined in part because of a racially inflammatory video posted to social, and in part because Ohio State’s student media wrote an ill-advised article about her video and its aftermath.

I continue to lament the path we took over this story, so I took the only reasonable course: I decided to teach it as an ethical scenario.

The gifts of being a journalist and adviser to young journalists are many, but among them for someone who teaches media ethics is the chance to teach real ethical scenarios within the context of real life reporting. It also provides the opportunity to let future reporters try out their decisions in real time and live the aftermath in a safe and protected environment.

The process is quite simple.

Students are broken into groups of five, and assigned roles of a real newsroom—editor, reporter, social media editor, managing editor and multimedia journalist. They are also provided a list of journalism ethical theories we have discussed and the SPJ Code of Ethics.

They are told to follow a social media channel created on Slack (basically an internal Twitter). A “tweet” comes across with a still from a fake computer generated video and verbiage that is similar to real experience.

The students need to decide what to do for of coverage. More “tweets” come through that indicate the video is going viral to see if that changes their decisions.

The teams need to write out their “coverage” plan, or lack thereof, and explain in writing why they are choosing their path, based on ethical theory.

They then publicly compare coverage between teams, and defend/debate why they did what they did. We also discuss the impact of the decisions they have made.

We spend 45 minutes on the initial assignment and then deconstruct it for the next 35 minutes to explore how decisions get made and the ramifications for their decision.

I use the same scenario in our core journalism course and in sports media, although the scenario changes.

A Sports Media scenario last semester revolved around a real situation where a reporter from a business paper sought comment for a pending article by sending me this email:

“I was wondering if you...knew of any professors or faculty members...who don't like how large an operation the athletics department is? Let me know if you have anyone in mind.”

Once again, I break them into teams but this time we have PR professionals, sources, editors and reporters. We work through what might happen with a source request made in such away, how PR professionals might respond, and how phrasing and transmission of message impact its reception and the response.

Our goal in ever circumstance is to make the situation as real as it can be from real-world scenarios and let them make multiple decisions and take multiple actions to determine a best course of action.

I often say media ethics are the gift that keep on giving, as there is no shortage of opportunity to learn from mistakes of others. Our students are destined to have their own challenges in their careers, but these in-class simulations help them avoid some of the more common ethical pitfalls when real lives are at stake.



“GOOD WORKS” CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

BY CHAD PAINTER, UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON



Robert Coles, in his work “The disparity between intellect and character,” writes about a pedagogy-changing conversation with one of his students, a Harvard sophomore from a Midwestern, working-class background.

The student asks: “I’ve been taking all these philosophy courses, and we talk about what’s true, what’s important, what’s good. Well, how do you teach people to be good?... What’s the point in knowing good, if you don’t keep trying to become a good person?”

The student’s argument is as old as Aristotle. Morality is a muscle, so the path to becoming a more moral person is to “exercise” that muscle by doing acts such as being kinder, more emphatic, or wiser.

Studying media ethics does not necessarily make a student a more ethical journalist, strategic communicator, or person. As Coles writes, “the study of philosophy—even moral philosophy of moral reasoning—doesn’t necessarily prompt in either the teacher or the student a determination to act in accordance with moral principles.”

The question then becomes: How might we as teachers encourage students and ourselves to shift from thought to action?

One assignment I have found useful is to have students keep a “good works” journal. For my classes, the assignment is ungraded—the motivation for doing good works, I believe, should be intrinsic rather than extrinsic.

“Morality is a muscle, so the path to becoming a more moral person is to ‘exercise’ that muscle by doing acts such as being kinder, more emphatic, or wiser.”

As the characters on the TV show *The Good Place* realize, an extrinsic reward can corrupt the ethical motivation. (As an aside, I would highly recommend the TV show; the “Trolley Problem” episode is must-see material for an ethics classroom).

These “good works” can take many forms. Coles offers examples such as community service and even classroom discussion. As a graduate student, a professor conducted a version of the project by having the class choose a charity and donate money throughout the semester; he matched the money raised dollar-for-dollar.

In my experience, the students who have had the most meaningful experiences have practiced what Saint Thérèse of Lisieux called “The Little Way.” The idea is that it is not necessary to accomplish heroic acts or great deeds. Instead, as Saint Thérèse wrote, “The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love.”

The assignment culminates during our final class period when I invite students to share their good works and reflect on their actions in terms of moral reasoning and development. Students generally recognize the “great deeds” and “little flowers” they have spread during the span of a few months, seeing the bigger picture that they have exercised their moral muscle. Like Coles’s students, “the best of them were small victories, brief epiphanies that might otherwise have been overlooked, but had great significance for the students in question.”



CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE WAKE OF #METOO

BY DEBORAH DWYER, MED GRADUATE STUDENT COMMITTEE



When the latest issue of *Media Ethics* magazine landed in my inbox, I clicked the link as soon as I saw it was dedicated to the #metoo movement. As a media ethics educator, it is a topic that has challenged me in the classroom far more than I could have imagined—but not in the ways I anticipated.

Last semester was a challenge. The social and political climate in America seemed to generate new case studies daily, prompting many class sessions where discussions diverged from my pre-planned objectives. I typically welcome those opportunities; #metoo, after all, was an excellent real-world case to examine from a media ethics standpoint. The effects of #metoo extended much further,

however. Sexual assault and gender power dynamics in American society seemed to linger in the background of virtually every discussion even tangentially related to the human condition. But it wasn’t the discussions focused on media ethics that left me feeling off balance. Instead, it was the emotional byproducts those discussions bred.

For example, one day a female student made a comment about journalists dealing with false claims of sexual assault. I saw another student a few rows back physically cringe before she questioned the first student; was she pre-supposing that most accusers are lying? The initial student seemed surprised at the way her comment was received, but her next statement unfortunately added insult to injury by questioning what, exactly, society should

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accept as constituting sexual harassment or assault. The response from the second student was swift and emotional, emphatic that what constitutes sexual assault could and should only be answered by the victim.

We could argue the specifics of their argument, but that isn't my point. The second student seemed triggered by more than a hypothetical discussion in a college class. Many women (and, likely, some men—a point I had to reinforce often) likely recognized the shorthand: she sounded like she may be a sexual assault survivor.

We ultimately navigated the discussion without further incident, but it was the first of several experiences in which the personal impact of sexual assault arose in my interactions with students, both individually and as a group. One woman disclosed in class that she was a survivor—an act that seemed freeing for her, but rattled several others. Another student came to my office hours several times to seek my advice about confronting what she felt was sexual harassment at work. And soon, I discovered my classroom wasn't an outlier; a quick poll of the other media instructors at my university returned several stories of their own personal and professional challenges related to #metoo.

I checked all the boxes regarding referrals to university resources as appropriate; that is my responsibility as an instructor. But do my—our—responsibilities extend further than that in the post-#metoo world? And if so, are we equipped to meet them? Do women instruc-

tors—many of whom may have posted “#metoo” on their own social media timelines—need to champion the issue in any way that differs from their male counterparts? Do teachers with personal experiences of harassment and/or assault need to consider their own triggers when approaching these topics with students?

It goes without saying that #metoo has helped

shine a light on an incredibly important social issue. For me, it also enlightened me regarding how removing the veil on our social ills can shift our classroom responsibilities in ways we may not first consider. As a junior scholar and instructor, I hope media educators continue these discussions not only as they relate to our course content, but to our role in spurring emotional growth and intelligence in our students as well.



WHAT I LEARNED FROM TEACHING MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS

BY TARA WALKER, MED GRADUATE STUDENT COMMITTEE



“I am not a lawyer.”

I had to admit this to my students several times, in several different ways over the course of the semester. They came up with some great questions about specific mass communication cases and the associated dates, but I had to tell them over and over “I’m not sure, actually,” or, “we’ll have to look that one up.” Teaching Media Law and Ethics this past fall situated me partially in comfortable territory, and partially in territory that, at the best felt unfamiliar, and at the worst felt hostile. For a non-lawyer, legal texts can be dense and a bit threatening. Finding a way to teach said legal texts without making eyes roll back in heads is a whole other challenge. This is where I found myself last fall.

I would have been a bit daunted by teaching either media law or media ethics, especially for the first time, but putting them together was like trying to teach history

and sociology simultaneously. Yes, the two subjects relate, but they’re not the same thing, and each is a world unto itself. I also knew that it would be important to emphasize to students that ethics and law are not the same thing – one is not a stand in for the other.

To account for both topics, media law and media ethics, at CU, we use two textbooks, Plaisance’s Media Ethics, (great book, thanks Patrick!) and Trager’s The Law of Journalism and Mass Communication. The students find the first text to be highly readable (and mercifully light to carry around,) but as for the second text, they find it... dense, to say the least. It’s chock-full of great information, but it’s hard to convince a group of 50 distracted 20-year-olds, with snapchat-itchy fingers, to read case law. I say this not because I’m trying to make some statement about kids today or those darn millennials, but because it’s hard for ME to focus on some of this stuff, let alone convince them to do so.

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On top of the whole new world of blending law with ethics, I also had more students than I've ever had before. I'm used to teaching classes of about 20 students. This past semester I had 50. Although it's never easy to make sure that everyone in your class is engaged, even in small classes, it's much, much harder when you double, or even triple their numbers. So, there was a lot of trial and error this semester. I feel like I figured some things out that I'm definitely going to use again next semester, and there were also a few things I will not repeat.

What did not work:

Talking too much. I realized quickly that it didn't work to talk for more than a few minutes without involving the students directly in the conversation. Their eyes glazed over, and I knew I was throwing legal jargon and ethical concepts at a brick wall.

Letting students sit in the back of the lecture hall. Students are experts at classroom geography. They know that in a big lecture hall, the back of the room is the best place to fade away while doing homework for other classes or shopping at Urban Outfitters.com. (True story.) MED president Erin Schauster advised that next semester I tell them they have to sit in the first three rows. I'm actually thinking about buying some caution tape and taping off a large section of the room, then claiming there was some sort of chemical spill there. Outside the box thinking, am I right?

Assuming students had knowledge they didn't have. We had an assignment where groups had to do presentations about ethical or legal cases. They were responsible for discussing the ethical controversies of legal cases and the legal controversies of ethical cases. After the first couple of presentations, it was clear that I needed to talk more about how to apply a case beyond its original context. Memorizing case law is one thing – applying it to real life is another.

What did work:

Getting students to collaborate as a group in class. We did an activity where groups of students had to work together to find examples of works that could be challenged in a court of law for copyright infringement. Each group was responsible for posting what they found on a google doc that I projected at the front of the room. They found memes and videos and Instagram posts, and we talked about every example and why it was or wasn't copyright infringement.

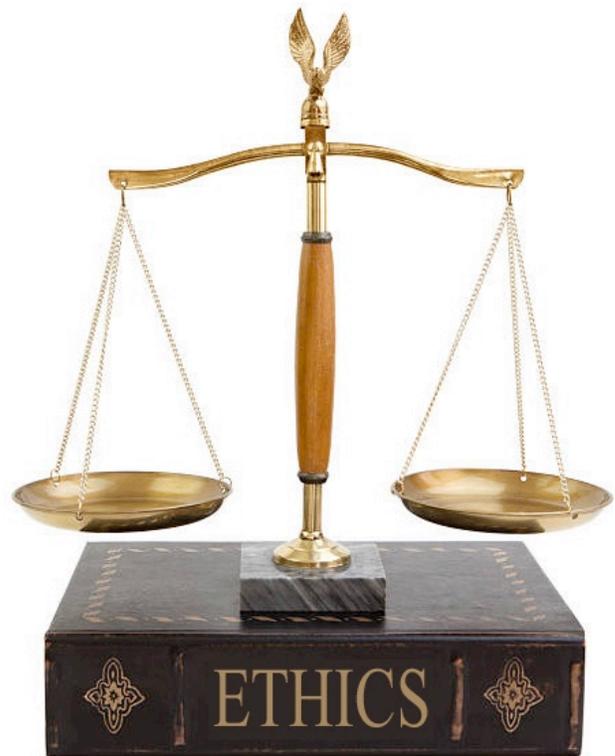
Pushing students to think beyond the obvious. The best part of the activity above, was when the discussion got a bit more theoretical. When we talked about their copyright examples, I asked, should this be copyright infringement? Is this law ethical? Is it just? Some of the stu-

dents weren't used to being pushed into this kind of normative philosophical thinking, but as soon as they were, things started to get heated, and therefore, fascinating.

Using examples they were already familiar with. When I used examples from popular culture in class, I got a lot more nodding heads. For example, we talked about the Hulk Hogan/Gawker controversy, major league baseball players taking steroids, and the trend of "finsta" (fake Instagram) accounts. We still talked about some landmark cases featuring dusty fedora-wearing plaintiffs from the 1920s, but the importance of these cases became much clearer for students if I referenced people or events they already knew something about.

Outsourcing teaching to the students. By this, I don't mean to suggest that I made students grade their own exams. Rather, I had students come up with discussion questions for class in class, find pertinent examples to illustrate key points, and explain their interpretations of class material in ways their peers could understand. I tried to decentralize the class as much as possible – taking the spotlight off me, and spreading it to them.

This class is still a work in progress. I'm teaching it again this spring, and I'm glad I get another chance. I'm excited to read the other articles that you all come up with for this issue of the newsletter – because if teachers couldn't steal each other's teaching wisdom, where would we be? Thanks in advance to all of you for sharing your insights!



TEARING UP THE SCRIPT IN JOURNALISM ETHICS CLASS

BY RAY MCCAFFREY, DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR ETHICS IN JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS



"Tearing up the script" has become a common practice employed by cable-TV news anchors and late-night talk show hosts alike. More and more, with a frenetic 24/7 news cycle powered by the latest developments or tweets involving President Donald Trump and his administration, the news anchors

find themselves having to scrap at the last second previously-planned topics for panel discussions, and even late-night talk show hosts find themselves working with comedy writers to retool their monologues closer and closer to air time.

Now journalism ethics instructors find themselves pressed by the same phenomenon as they approach the start of class. Should they tear up the script when a compelling journalism ethics case suddenly emerges? Or should they try to stick to the script that has been laid out in the course syllabus?

Here are just some of the news developments that turned into compelling cases discussed in my Ethics in Journalism class at the University of Arkansas during the Fall 2018 semester.

The New York Times took what it called "the rare step of publishing an anonymous Op-Ed essay" by a "senior official in the Trump administration," who wrote "that many of the senior officials in his own administration are working diligently from within to frustrate parts of his agenda and his worst inclinations."

CNN labeled a Trump campaign ad about a Mexican migrant convicted of killing two deputies as "racist" in a headline, taking what could be construed as another rare step of injecting an unattributed editorial stance into a news story.



The Trump White House later stripped CNN White House reporter Jim Acosta of his "hard pass" press credentials after he peppered Trump with unwanted questions then refused to yield his microphone, launching a First Amendment battle in which a federal judge ruled in favor of the network.

During one class in which I followed the course syllabus and discussed how journalists handle offensive content in the news, I felt a need to mention two very recent cases. *The New York Times* had run stark photos of starving Yemeni children victimized in the country's civil war, images the *Times* wrote "may be as unsettling as anything we have used" but added: "This is our job as journalists: to bear witness, to give voice to those who are otherwise abandoned, victimized and forgotten." *New York* magazine also ran a number of stark photos as well – portraits of the scarred bodies of dozens of victims of school shootings in the country.

I felt compelled to mention to the students that these two cases had both occurred within the past week. And, oh yes, NBC talk-show host Megyn Kelly had also been fired during that same time after running a segment on her show about how the "costume police" were cracking down on Halloween costumes – and Kelly questioned why it was considered racist to wear "blackface," adding that "when I was a kid, that was O.K., as long as you were dressing up as a character."

The obvious advantage to these seemingly non-stop developments is that the cases are incredibly current – not some incident that happened years before students were born. The disadvantage is that being spur-of-the-moment can leave students lost because they have not had the opportunity to review the fundamentals necessary to discuss these cases in fuller detail.

I try to make sure that we stay on track with the subject areas many journalism ethics teachers cover, such as privacy concerns, conflicts of interest, plagiarism and fabrication, the use of anonymous sources, the dangers of stereotyping based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other factors. Yet, the news developments don't seem to follow the schedule on the course syllabus.

For example, when the *Times* published its Op-Ed essay by the anonymous Trump administration official, the Fall 2018 semester was barely a couple of weeks old. We had not had a chance to discuss the ethics of using anonymous sources or review the criteria the *Times* and other news outlets use to determine whether to grant anonymity. Instead, we focused on what we had already covered, in particular the four principles of the So-

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ciety of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. Of particular interest was the Times' efforts to meet the SPJ standards relating to transparency and accountability, which could be seen in a follow-up piece, "How the Anonymous Op-Ed Came to Be," in which it responded to "nearly 23,000 readers" who "had submitted questions to us about the vetting process and our thinking behind publishing the essay." One of my students was able to draw a parallel with another case that we had already discussed – the Times' decision to go against long-standing rules in 1971 and publish the Pentagon Papers. As with the Pentagon Papers, end-based thinking had won out over rule-based thinking. Editors at the *Times* abandoned the rule against publishing anonymous op-ed pieces just as they had thrown out the one that prohibited the publication of classified materials. In both cases, the information was considered to be important to the public, so the ends justified the means, so to speak.

Other times, though, our consideration of current ethical cases fell flat. The case involving the White House

revoking Acosta's "hard pass" credentials drew negligible interest from students, perhaps because it had so much to do with media law – a core class that some had not yet had the chance to take.

As I prepare now for my Ethics in Journalism class for the Spring 2019 semester, I am still grappling with the importance of these new journalism ethics cases. Should they be added to the lesson plan or is it better to stick with the classic cases that have been the bedrock of the syllabus? The trick is probably to better tie the two together – to illustrate how the decisions that the Times had to make in dealing with the then anonymous source who gave it the Pentagon Papers are not dissimilar than those that faced current editors at the newspaper when dealing with the author of the controversial Op-Ed piece.

In the meantime, I continue to prepare a script that is just waiting to be torn apart.



JUSTIFYING YOUR JOB: AEJMC 2018 PF&R PANEL ON ETHICS

BY WENDY WYATT, UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS



Helping future media professionals develop sophisticated skills to recognize ethical issues, reason through these issues, and then decide on justifiable actions is a process that begins in the classroom. However, changes in the media landscape have made ethics instruction more challenging and have made career-long skills development essential. The Professional Freedom and Responsibility (PF&R) panel at the 2018 AEJMC conference featured a group of media ethics educators and media professionals who shared ideas on how they can work together to help raise the ethical bar throughout the media landscape. In the article below, ethics professor Wendy Wyatt shares her comments from the panel.

One of the goals of the PF&R Committee is to help build connections between the academy and the profession. This panel provides a great opportunity for a conversation between academics and media professionals about our goals and expectations around ethics.

I love teaching media ethics, so I feel fortunate to be at an institution that has made ethics the capstone course in its communication and journalism program for almost 60 years; the course began in 1959. But clearly the work we do is one step in a continuous process of developing knowledge, skills and attitudes around ethics. For the next few minutes, I want to share the particular pedagogical approach I advocate – what I try to do with my students for the short time they spend with me. And then I'll offer a few thoughts on what I hope happens when students leave our universities' hallowed halls.

My approach is one that teaches certainty about some things, but uncertainty about others, and it's an approach that has humble yet lofty goals. It isn't unique. I know I share the approach with at least a few people in the room. But as Patrick Plaisance noted several years ago when he

did an "Assessment of Media Ethics Education" – and something I would contend holds true today – educators and professionals don't always agree on what the central goals of a media ethics course should be. Perhaps some of you in the room won't agree with me, and I'll be interested in hearing your thoughts because I think the conversation is worth having, not only because the demand for media ethics courses is growing, and more instructors are being called upon to teach them, but also because we in media programs have our critics out there in the public. I'm sure many of us have run into this situation: We meet someone new, and the conversation quickly goes to what we do. And when we tell our new acquaintance that we teach media ethics, that person says, "Is there such a thing?" I happen to think there is, but we need to work hard to make media ethics education matter; to prove wrong all of the critics who think the term is an oxymoron.

Here is the essence of my approach. The first part is based on a chapter by Daniel Callahan of the Hastings

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Center, a chapter that's now nearly 40 years old. It comes from a book called *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*. And as much new and interesting work that has come out since the time Callahan's work was published, I find myself returning to his ideas time and time again.

In the chapter, Callahan says that all ethics courses should work to do the following things:

STIMULATE STUDENTS' MORAL IMAGINATIONS.

This includes connecting to student's emotions – getting not only their minds, but their hearts and their guts involved. It's the passion part of ethics, and it's what drew me initially to the field as an undergraduate. This goal includes helping students understand that there is a "moral point of view" and that, as Callahan says, we all live our lives in a web of moral relationships.

FOSTER IN STUDENTS THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE ETHICAL ISSUES.

This includes, in Callahan's words, the "conscious, rational attempt to sort out those elements in emotional responses that represent appraisal and judgment." In working to foster this ability, my students and I spend time teasing out differences between issues that relate to the ethical sphere and those that relate to some other sphere like that of economics or the law. At the same time, we also work to recognize how many issues have ethical dimensions, which is something students don't always see going in. The goal of recognizing ethical issues is one that, time and time again at the end of the semester, students have identified as being especially meaningful. I'll see comments on my teaching evaluations that say things like this: "Before class, I didn't realize how many situations have ethical dimensions. My ethical radar has become a lot more sensitive."

ELICIT A SENSE OF MORAL OBLIGATION, CONVINCING STUDENTS THAT THEY CANNOT SIMPLY CHECK OUT OF THE ETHICAL REALM.

This moves us out of the sphere of reason and emotion and into that of action. As Callahan maintains, ethics often makes students feel as though they're constantly chasing their tails, and this can be exasperating. But that exasperation cannot become an excuse for getting and staying stuck, for inaction. Even when no choice is ideal, which is often the case with real ethical dilemmas, students learn that they need to commit to a course of action and be willing to stand behind it.

GOAL NUMBER FOUR IS DEVELOPING ANALYTICAL SKILLS.

This is one, I would guess, all teachers of ethics share. I see the goal as helping students acquire a set of tools that they can put to use in ethical decision making. For

me, these tools include things students bring to the table based on their life experiences; for shorthand, we could call this their moral intuition. The tools also include things students rely on their profession to provide, such as professional norms and codes. And the tools include skills students develop in applying moral theory.

CALLAHAN'S FINAL GOAL IS HELPING STUDENTS LEARN TO TOLERATE AND REDUCE AMBIGUITY AND DISAGREEMENT.

Without fostering this ability, students get frustrated and feel as though they're never reaching the "end," never arriving at that predetermined answer they seem to think we professors are looking for. Callahan calls ethics an austere pleasure, partially because it's so imbued with ambiguity. My hope is that students can learn to appreciate this kind of pleasure as I have.

BEYOND CALLAHAN'S GOALS, I ADD ANOTHER: THE GOAL OF FOSTERING ONE ANOTHER'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT.

In my experience, students are fascinated with the ideas behind the moral development theories of Erickson, Perry, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Rest, just as I was when my mentor Deni Elliott introduced them to me. In the early part of my classes, I work to convince students that we can develop morally, that we can get more sophisticated about this stuff. But – and this is a crucial point – we need each other to do that. Ethics is about more than individual reflection; it's about engagement with others. It's about being willing, in the Habermasian sense, to opt in to practical discourse. It's about being exposed to moral controversy and being encouraged to see things from other points of view. And it's about having responsibility to make moral decisions that help create and maintain a just and caring community. I spend a lot of time working with my students to convince them that the best decisions are the result of a discursive process. Students need to put their ideas out there, to justify those ideas, to hear what others have to say and even to be willing – at times – to change their minds.

If my students leave with nothing more than, first, a commitment to engage with others about ethical issues and, second, the courage to do it, I have accomplished two of my primary aims.

Notice that none of these goals speaks to teaching students what to do in a particular situation. This is one area where I've noticed differences in approach between me and some of my media ethics colleagues. In their classes, there is often an answer – a course of action – that is the ultimate destination, a place where professors intend for the students to arrive. I have at least three concerns with this approach.

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First, it gives a kind of moral authority to the professor that I find problematic. In this approach, the goal for students becomes figuring out what the professor thinks is right, rather than engaging in their own analysis. Second, many of these predetermined answers are based on long-standing professional conventions, which are assumed to be good, useful and ethically defensible without question. Both of these concerns relate back to moral development theory. Making judgments simply based on what the authority figure says is right (in the case of the professor) or what the peer group says is right (in the case of professional conventions) represents a stage of moral development that I hope we can work beyond. Third – and more pragmatically – as we all know, media professions are transforming far too rapidly to predict what students will face one year or ten years down the road. We simply can't develop a list of ethically justifiable and ethically prohibited actions that are guaranteed to be applicable for students when they enter – and as they move through – their professional lives. I would contend – again borrowing from Habermas – that in an ethics class, everything ought to be up for debate, even some of those long-standing disciplinary conventions. And rather than treating ethics as a collection of knowledge to be acquired, it should be viewed as something for which we are continually developing skills of inquiry and analysis.

What I've talked about so far are areas in which I hope to foster a sense of certainty among students. I'd like to move now to what I call areas of uncertainty. In my mind, a good media ethics course can be a great confidence buster. In fact, it's my goal that students leave class seeing some things a little less clearly and feeling a little less certain than when they arrived. This may sound like the hallmark of poor teaching, but the goal of complicating media ethics is grounded in a belief that doing so will help lead to more critically-reflective and engaged media practitioners. Complicating media ethics will help students develop the habit of keeping their eyes wide open for ethical issues, and it will help lead them to want to opt in to that all-important discourse.

The first area of uncertainty relates to what I call the codes and conventions of media professions – their norms. In my experience, media ethics is one of the few courses where students are asked to think critically about those norms. In other classes, particularly those that emphasize skills building, students are taught how others in their profession do things; in other words, they're taught how to fit in. Ethics class is a chance to move from the descriptive – this is what my profession looks like – to the prescriptive – this is what my profession ought to

look like. It's a chance for students to critique the conventions of their craft, whatever that craft may be. In doing so, students often uncover ethical questions about long-standing norms. What's more, they're often uncertain about how those questions should be addressed. And suddenly their profession seems far more ethically complex than it did when they entered class. This can be frustrating for students, but realizing the flaws of a profession can lead to a more honest and authentic assessment of dilemmas within it.

Secondly, and perhaps more controversially, I'm encouraged by students who leave class feeling less certain about their decisions than when they arrived. I'm sure you've all had the experience of students who come to class with a level of confidence that's almost astounding. Here, I'm talking about these students, but not only them. Although much of my class is spent developing tools of analysis and justification, which would seem logically to lead to more confidence, a successful ethics class demonstrates to students that true ethical dilemmas can be excruciatingly difficult and that no answer will alleviate all

harm. Students who have – or develop – some uncertainty about their decisions demonstrate to me, first, an understanding of the nature of ethical dilemmas and, second, a level of sympathy for multiple perspectives.

I want students to recognize ethical issues when they encounter them. I want students to engage in a process to work through them. And

ultimately, I want students to commit to a course of action. But humility is also a virtue. Students who realize they don't have it all figured out may be less certain of their decisions, but they are more suited for dealing with the difficult ethical dilemmas they will surely encounter.

In the end, I don't expect students to leave my class as moral philosophers. I don't even expect they'll be able to recite by memory the primary clauses of their profession's code of ethics. But I do hope they'll begin to see ethics as part of who they are and how they go through their lives. The muddiness and the uncertainty are part of what makes ethics interesting and part of what keeps students – who are on their way to becoming practitioners – continuing to ask the important questions. Being willing and able to ask those questions will go far in advancing the ethical practice of any media profession.

So that's what I hope for my students when they're in the classroom. What do I hope for them when they leave college and enter the professional world? Put simply, more of the same.

ETHICS IS A CONSTANTLY DEVELOPING SKILL OF INQUIRY. IT ISN'T SOME FINITE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE OR GROUP OF SKILLS THAT WE LEARN AND THEN SIMPLY SAY, OKAY, WE HAVE THIS ALL FIGURED OUT. IT TAKES CONTINUOUS WORK.

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Ethics is something I would call a constantly developing skill of inquiry. It isn't some finite body of knowledge or group of skills that we learn and then simply say, okay, we have this all figured out. It takes continuous work. Therefore, I would love to see workplaces encourage intentional conversations about ethics. In fact, I tell my students to ask questions about ethics when they interview for jobs. How does the organization with which they're interviewing encourage its employees to approach ethical issues? Are there systems or processes in place to support employees in ethical deliberation? If there's an ethics code, is it a living, breathing thing? And how does the organization stand behind its employees when they take an ethical stand?

I realize that most media organizations work under daily pressures: pressures of time, money, competition. Doing this kind of intentional work around ethics may not seem realistic. But if we care about an ethical media landscape, I think it's essential. We need to view ethics as something that calls on ongoing professional development. The start we give our students in the classroom can be meaningful and important, but it is just that: a start. When students leave the classroom and enter the professional world, they haven't crossed the finish line in their ethical development but rather have reached one point along a much-longer course. And while the terrain will surely change, the thinking, deliberating and even debating about how to navigate that terrain should continue.



HOW TO BE A TOP REVIEWER

BY KATHLEEN BARTZEN CULVER, RESEARCH CHAIR



The AEJMC Uniform and Media Ethics Division papers calls are [now out in the latest newsletter](#), so it's the most wonderful time of the year ... REVIEWER TIME! It doesn't have quite the ring of Hammer Time, but it is among the most important services we can provide as MED members.

I was incredibly fortunate to have an exceptional reviewer on one of my earliest paper submissions to AEJMC. Whoever that person was, she or he helped me grow as a researcher and as a writer. As MED research chair this year, I'm hoping to encourage that same kind of reviewing for submissions to our paper calls.

MED member Jane Singer, professor of innovation journalism at the City University of London, recently was [honored by Journalism Studies for her outstanding reviewing](#), and my predecessor MED research chairs all said she's tops. I asked Jane to share some of her ideas and practices, so we all can give valuable feedback.

Q&A with Jane Singer

What is your overall philosophy when serving as a reviewer for conference papers?

Conference papers are (or should be) preliminary versions of journal submissions. Reviews should be less about critiquing what is essentially a polished draft and more about putting on a journal editorial board hat: offering suggestions for how the author can improve the odds that the paper will be accepted for publication. I try to provide constructive feedback on what I see as the key aspects of

the work. If I think of a good journal "fit," I suggest that, too.

A slightly different situation, but while we're here: If I'm a discussant, I write up about a page of comments per paper ahead of time and provide them to each author individually. But in my public remarks, I try to find common threads or themes among the papers presented, or at least to highlight the most interesting ideas. My view is that the discussant's time allocation is for synthesizing, not for critiquing. No one but the author cares what the discussant thinks about his or her paper; public nit-picking is not only painful for the author but also wastes the time of every other person in the room, many of whom will be burning to ask their own questions.

Do you see conference reviewing as different from journal reviewing? And if so, in what ways?

To be honest, the bar is a bit lower. Conferences are places for exchanging, and getting feedback on, ideas that may still be in development. Journal articles also are always iterative, as that's the nature of our enterprise, but the material they present should be more definitive in order to serve as a base on which other scholars can build. I'd be much more likely to recommend acceptance of a conference paper with, for instance, methodological flaws if it was conceptually interesting or otherwise innovative than I would a journal article with the same flaws. That said, the basic evaluation criteria are the same, including an interesting premise, a reasonably solid grounding in the literature, an appropriate method (for empirical work), cogent presentation of the findings, and a discus-

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sion that does justice to the material. And good writing/diligent proofing always matter!

What makes for the most valuable review feedback?

Feedback should be constructive and specific; it should be more substantive than “I liked (or hated) this”; and it should be about the paper as written, not about the study the reviewer would have done instead. It does me little good as an author to get a comment like “this paper was vague in places” or “there is more literature on this topic.” Which places, exactly, should be clarified? Which scholars should I be reading and citing? Nor is it helpful to be told that I have selected the “wrong” method or conceptual framework. Please help me make this manuscript better instead of telling me to chuck it out and do another study entirely. And it should go without saying, but: Any ad hominem attacks should be purged from a review. The focus should always be on the scholarship, not the scholar.

Oh, and the reviewer should actually have read the paper. All of it. Sometimes I wonder. A recent ICA conference paper that stated in the abstract, introduction and in various other places throughout that it was an essay and not an empirical study came back with the comment “This seems to be mostly [!] an essay.” No shit, Sherlock.

That said, as a conference paper author, I accept and expect that reviewers are unlikely to be as well-versed in my subject matter as a journal’s reviewers, who are selected because of their expertise in relation to my submission. It’s fine to say “all your literature is from the early 2000s and should be updated” even if you can’t point me toward specific references. Even a generalist reviewer should be able to identify the broad brushstrokes of what makes a strong paper strong or a weak paper weak.

What barriers do reviewers face and how can they get over, around or through them?

I think the two biggest barriers are a lack of time and, again, a lack of expertise. The turnaround time for conference paper reviews is generally tight, and AEJMC reviews have to be done in April, toward the end of the U.S. academic year and typically the Month from Hell in terms of both student and colleague demands. Conference paper reviews all too easily drift down to the bottom of the to-do list – followed by panic, a quick skim and a two-line review plus a bunch of non-committal mid-range rankings that can doom a solid submission that deserves better.

The lack of expertise can be frustrating to an author, but no one wants to be the infamous Reviewer Number Three, either. I’ve gotten my fair share of conference papers that make me mutter “WTF am I going to be able to say about this?” If so, I usually confess as much to the author: “Apologies, this is not my subject area, so take this

feedback with a big grain of salt.” From there, I do try to provide at least some generalist comments that might be of use; we all can recognize clear communication or logical organization, for instance. We generally have at least some idea about the proper application of widely used methods, about the appropriate presentation of different kinds of data, and about how well a discussion connects back to research questions and literature. It’s incredibly rare that we truly have nothing useful to say.

One particular stumbling block for me: I’m complete rubbish at statistics beyond the absolute basics. I really have no idea how to assess work that relies on sophisticated analytical techniques – and to me, anything much fancier than percentages is pretty darned sophisticated. Again, my strategy is just to ‘fess up ... and if something looks completely implausible even to me, I go with something like: “Are you sure that 20 completed surveys out of your sample of 1,000 journalists is a 25% response rate?”

Can you think of a piece of review feedback that was particularly helpful to you? Particularly unhelpful?

I have benefitted from a great many excellent reviews over the years, the kind that point out a hole needing to be filled or an additional concept that would add nuance to the findings – and suffered from a few that were useless. In the latter category, in addition to numerical rankings with absolutely no comments at all, are both “great paper” and “terrible paper.” Of course, we’d all rather have the “great paper” because it means we get to go to, say, Toronto. But as feedback, it’s of no help. I want to know what you saw as its strengths so I can build on them for my journal submission – or at a minimum, be sure to highlight them in my poster or presentation. And “terrible paper” is just terrible feedback all around.

Any tips for workflow or just flat-out getting things done?

This isn’t possible for everyone, but those who are, um, lucky enough to commute to work on public transit know that’s ideal paper-reading and -annotating time. I can’t finish a full-length paper in one trip, but two or three journeys and I’m all the way through a manuscript. I then try my best to carve out time to write up my comments the same day, while it’s still fresh in my mind and I can actually decipher my writing-on-a-train scribbles; if that’s impossible, I at least write the feedback before I start reading the next paper in the stack. I write all my reviews, including my numerical rankings, in a single Word doc, and for conference papers, I aim for around a single page of comments per paper – more can feel overwhelming, especially for student authors, and much less is a missed opportunity to improve all but the most spectacular papers. (If I

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get one of those, I include a note to the research chair indicating the work should be considered for a top paper award, of course.) When they're all written (and spell-checked!), I then copy and paste each review into the on-line form. But my main tip is to pace yourself: If you get four AEJMC papers to review, force yourself to read and write up comments on one per week, and all will be well. Leave them all until the Sunday afternoon before they're due, and ... not so much. If you've spread out the work, you might just be able to put that Sunday to better use. A well-earned nap, maybe.

Good luck to all MED reviewers, and a big thanks for your service to the AEJMC community!

Register as a Reviewer

Now that you have all these great insights, are you ready to share your time and talents with MED paper authors? Please visit this form and enter your information by Feb. 1.

Look for information on reviewing on the MED mailing list, [Facebook group](#) and [Twitter account](#). We're looking forward to strong submissions that advance our understanding of ethics in media contexts. If you have any questions, please feel free to [email me](#).



NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE PENN STATE DAVIS ETHICS AWARD

BY, PATRICK PLAISANCE, DON DAVIS PROFESSOR OF ETHICS, PENN STATE



Scholars who have successfully defended ethics-related dissertations in the 2018 calendar year are encouraged to apply for the new Penn State Davis Ethics Award. The award provides a \$1,000 honorarium, travel support to present their scholarship in a session of the Media Ethics Division at the 2019 AEJMC annual conference, and a fully supported guest-lecture visit to Penn State's Bellisario College of Communications. The Don W. Davis Professor in Ethics at Penn State, Patrick Lee Plaisance, shall administer all aspects of the award competition and selection process.

Applications should include a cover letter stating applicant's ethics-related focus and contact information, statement of defense date, full dissertation (either in pdf format or a web link), and dissertation adviser contact information. All applications are due April 1, 2019, and should be sent to plp22@psu.edu. The award will be presented at the Media Ethics Division's Business Meeting

during the 2019 AEJMC conference. This award is intended to recognize new scholarship in the fields of media and communication ethics, and is sponsored by the Davis Program in Ethical Leadership at Penn State. Arrangements for a guest-lecture visit to Penn State will be made for fall 2019 based on recipient availability.

MED TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

BY, JAN LEACH, TEACHING CHAIR



Your syllabi are freshly copied. Your assignments are carefully planned. You've either met your new students or will meet them soon. Now is the time to think about why teaching ethics is important to you.

Nominations are open for the Media Ethics Division's third annual Teaching Excellence Award. The award recognizes outstanding classroom teaching. The first winner was current MED chair Erin Schauster and last year's winner was MED PF&R chair Nicole Kraft. Don't you deserve to be in their company?

Any MED member who teaches media ethics, journalism ethics, ad/PR ethics or media law and ethics is eligible for the award (except the division head, vice head and teaching chair.)

AEJMC members who are not MED members are invited and encouraged to join MED to be eligible for the award. The application is relatively easy to compile. We share the winners' ideas on the division's

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[teaching resources website.](#)

Applicants for the MED Teaching Excellence Award must have been teaching ethics for at least three years. The MED Teaching Award Selection Committee for 2018-19 consists of chair Erin Schauster (University of Colorado-Boulder), Vice Chair Marlene Neill (Baylor University) and Teaching Committee Chair Jan Leach (Kent State University.)

Nominations, including self-nominations, consist of an application, a syllabus or lesson plan or activity, a brief statement of teaching philosophy and two letters of recommendation. One recommendation must be from a student or former student. The other must be from a faculty member or colleague, supervisor or department chair, dean or administrator where the nominee currently teaches. The application is available here and on the MED Google Group site in Jan Leach's post of Oct. 9.

Nominations including the application form, materials and recommendations are due to Jan Leach via email at jleach1@kent.edu by Monday, April 15, 2019. The winner will be notified on or before June 3 and is expected to attend the AEJMC annual meeting and the MED business meeting. The winner will receive a plaque and a small monetary award. Direct questions to Jan Leach at jleach1@kent.edu.

MED TEACHING PANEL REDUX

BY, JAN LEACH, TEACHING CHAIR

We're all looking for ways to keep our students engaged and accomplish teaching and learning goals, but sometimes it's hard to sort out the shiny new ideas from truly useful things that promote and encourage learning.

Sorting it out was the goal when MED hosted a teaching session at AEJMC's conference last summer. Titled "10 Cool Ideas You Can Use RIGHT NOW to Teach Ethics, Fake News (and maybe even organize your life,)" the panel offered practical tips from classroom activities to software to best practices. Four presenters told the packed gathering what they're using to teach ethics, introduce media literacy/identify fake news and manage their classrooms and their schedules.

A summary of all the presentations is at bit.ly/culverAEJMC18, thanks to Katy Culver (scroll to the fifth sub-head.) Steal these tools and make your teaching and your lives easier.

Allysa Appelman, Northern Kentucky University (MC&S), discussed fact-checking resources including the well-known Data Journalism Handbook and courses available from Poynter's NewsU. She also demonstrated digital tools for fact verification, such as whois.com (the internet directory that lists domain owners), EXIF Data Viewer, TinEye Reverse Image Search and YouTube Data Viewer. Alyssa teaches journalism and mass communication courses and focuses her research on journalism studies and media psychology. She is at appelmana1@nku.edu.

Katy Bartzen Culver, University of Wisconsin-Madison (MED), showed how to spot what she called "deep fakes," such as fake tweets and fake html. She then introduced "Katy's Grand Theory of Life Organization" and suggested practical ways to manage overlapping obligations with tools like SLACK, spreadsheet schedules and email signatures. Perhaps the most valuable advice Culver offered is a memo she sends to students seeking references and recommendations. The memo requires students to provide information Culver can use to write a personal endorsement. Katy, an assistant professor and director of UW-Madison Center for Journalism Ethics, is MED's research chair. She is at kbculver@wisc.edu.

Nicole Kraft, Ohio State University (MED), introduced Perusall (a tool that allows students and teachers to collaboratively mark up PDF documents) and VoiceThread (an online learning tool for students and instructors to create, share and discuss documents, videos and the like.) She also reviewed a police simulation exercise for covering an active shooter situation with ethics discussion questions. Nicole, an Apple Distinguished Educator, was featured in a New York Times [article](#) last summer about teaching iGen students how to use devices and apps for academics. Nicole is MED's PF&R chair and last year won the division's Teaching Excellence Award. She is at kraft.42@osu.edu.

Christina Smith, Georgia College and State University (MC&S), presented a full lesson plan for teaching non-journalism majors how to spot misinformation and fake news. The two-day/one-week lesson includes a short lecture on misinformation and the difference between news and opinion, small- and large-group activities, discussion and online games to illustrate how pervasive and ubiquitous fake news can be. Christina led participants in online exercises Factitious and Fake it to Make It. These and copies of her handouts are available at the link above. Christina, an assistant professor, is at christina.smith1@gcsu.edu.

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QUICK LINKS (More than 10!)

See the [bit.ly link](#), above, for even more

- The Data Journalism Handbook, <https://datajournalismhandbook.org/>
- EXIF data viewer, <http://exifdata.com/>
- Factitious, <http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/>
- Fake It to Make It, <https://www.fakeittomakeitgame.com/>
- Google Reverse Image Search, <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/1325808?co=GENIE.Platform%3DAndroid&hl=en>
- Perusall, <https://perusall.com/>
- The Poynter Institute, NewsU, <https://www.poynter.org/newsu/>
- SLACK, <https://slack.com/>
- TinEye Reverse Image Search, <https://www.tineye.com/>
- VoiceThread, <https://voicethread.com/>
- Whois.com, <https://www.whois.com/>
- YouTube Data Viewer, <https://citizenevidence.org/2014/07/01/youtube-dataviewer/>

HAVE YOU TRIED “CASE AND COMMENTARIES”? YOU SHOULD

BY, GINNY WHITEHOUSE, EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



One of the greatest challenges in media ethics education is distinguishing between heat and light. The heat of a free-for-all that brings students to their feet in passionate disagreement may create a memorable classroom moment and even increase teaching evaluations. However, heat does not necessarily bring enlightened understanding of ways to identify, analyze, or resolve an ethical issue in complex media markets. Enjoying a good, heated discussion creates interest. Learning how to evaluate a problem helps students apply frameworks for the crisis that comes long after they have left the classroom.

The *Journal of Media Ethics* Case and Commentaries section provides instructors with fodder for both. Twice a year, the journal publishes contemporary cases concerning media issues across media platforms and disciplines: film to online news, public relations to political reporting, blogging to research ethics, entertainment programming to publishing. Most important, these cases are written from the perspective of media academics and professionals from multiple countries.

In 2017, the cases considered Big Brother India’s exploitation of participants and the CNN decision to tape delay President Trump’s live broadcasts. Next year, cases are expected to consider Bulgarian lottery advertising and the #Me-Too movement internationally. Three to five commentators offer widely differing perspectives on ethically problems. All cases are real and all commentaries are original. Check your JME archives for more examples.

Finding the commonality as well as the distinctive differences in the way other media cultures identify and evaluate ethical problems not only helps expand worldviews, but also introduces alternate solutions to domestic problems. The commentaries on the given case provide instructors with multiple and readily available expert viewpoints, which students can use as a foundation for their opinions or for analysis.

Each case runs under 1,500 words and each commentary approximately 1,000 words, giving the instructor opportunity shorten or expand a reading assignment as needed. Also, the depth provided is appropriate for class discussion without the infernal “but I need more information” cop-out.

The cases themselves generally focus on a specific incident or narrowly defined issue, though occasionally broader problems are included if they can be addressed adequately in 1,500 words. Media professionals directly involved in a case are included as commentators, in addition to academics, whenever possible. If you are interested in writing a case, please contact me at ginny.whitehouse@eku.edu

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LEARNING FROM ETHICISTS



Learn how ethics is taught at leading institutions from this [RECENT STUDY](#) of philosophy departments and professional programs, compiled by Dr. Tom Cooper of Emerson College. The findings are sometimes surprising.



A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION
FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM
AND MASS COMMUNICATION

