

# Ethical News

The newsletter of the AEJMC  
Media Ethics Division

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## A cross-cultural approach to teaching ethics

**Ginny Whitehouse**  
MED chair

On the day cross-cultural issues are introduced in my Media Ethics class, I raid my scarf drawer and require the men to wear silk coverings on their heads. My team-teaching colleague, a man, wears something resembling a burqua.

We discuss – actually the women and I discuss because the men aren't allowed to talk – the struggles in approaching the ethics of other cultures, of determining which issues are culturally relative and which violate universal ethical principles. We consider how to approach other cultures as though we were approaching holy ground.

The students take predictable positions:

◆ **Dehumanization** (They treat people like animals; therefore, they must be ani-

mals and deserve what they get.)

◆ **Moral superiority** (Westerners give women freedoms; just remember Fox's *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*.)

◆ **Abuse of relativism** (It's a tough problem that nobody agrees on. Therefore, we'll adopt relativism for expedience's sake – and everything from slavery to genocide is merely a "cultural thing.")

Intercultural theorists can help media ethics students approach cultural differences – from interpretations of journalistic freedom to the introduction of foreign advertising-- more creatively.

Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir's theories of linguistic determinism are foundational in speech communication theory. During the 1930s and 1940s, they studied the vocabulary of Native American languages and found that words are not merely a means of reporting experience but defining it. A Navajo father would not say his

child is "young" but rather than he "moves about newly." He would not "get dressed" but rather "move into clothing." This reflects the Navajo culture's perception of the universe in motion. Similarly, English has only two words for parents' siblings: aunt and uncle. Nearly all Asian languages include multiple words that more precisely define the relationship: mother's older brother; father's younger sister, etc. The emergence of this vocabulary reflects different cultural assumptions about family and the roles that individuals play in one.

Language then may define and influence experience and meaning, rather than being a series of words that can be translated from English to French to Chinese. More recently, scholars have largely dismissed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' complete separation of language development and thought development.

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## Paper submissions up

Submissions to the Media Ethics Division are up this year, with 29 papers in the research chair's hands by April 5 and a few more on the way. The total includes 10 papers submitted for the Burnett competition for graduate students.

This year's numbers represent an increase of 6 papers over last year's total of 23, and a doubling of faculty submissions, according to Division Head Ginny

Whitehouse. "The dramatic increase in faculty submissions appears to reflect a growing interest in evaluating and exploring what media ethics should be," Whitehouse said.

The increase in submissions means that one or two more paper judges would be welcomed. If you are willing and able, please contact Stephanie Craft at CraftS@missouri.edu.

— Stephanie Craft

## Clarify legitimately held expectations of media

**Stephanie Craft**  
research chair

I stepped out of the cloistered world of my own office, discipline and school just long enough the other day to discover exactly how much work we media ethics researchers have to do. I mean hard work.

This revelation – and forgive me if it isn't much of a revelation to you – came during the media ethics session at the

Association for Practical and Professional Ethics conference in Cincinnati a few weeks ago. The presenters offered interesting glimpses of their research, which included an examination of the ethics surrounding journalistic predictions, an argument for considering the entire social institution of "the media" as a single moral agent, and new ways of thinking about journalistic responsibility in post-Cold War international

See Researchers, page 4

## Make assessment a part of student learning

**Stephen Ward**  
University of British Columbia

The assessment of ethics students raises challenges that are generic to higher education teaching and specific to applied ethics. One challenge is the increasing pluralism of our classrooms: How do I teach -- let alone assess -- students with so many different experiences, learning styles and interests? Another challenge is how to design an assessment process that is appropriate for ethics, a field that requires students to acquire a range of competencies, from ethical reasoning to knowledge of principles.

Notice that I call assessment a "process." Assessment is not what happens at the end of the course -- a mark on paper. It should be a process of evaluation throughout the course. It should allow students to judge how well they are progressing toward the learning objectives of the course.

How might instructors do this? From the start, you need to clearly explain how what will happen in class -- from discussions of readings to assignments -- will be related to your criteria of assessment. Start by re-designing your class syllabus. Construct the syllabus as a basic course document that explains your teaching and assessment philosophy, and provides a roadmap that can be referred to again and again. Avoid starting your syllabus with a dreary list of class readings. Instead, begin with a clear statement of the course's main objectives. Overall, the goal should be to have the stu-

dents acquire a set of common competencies via different learning routes. Then, state the responsibilities of both the instructor and the students to make that learning happen, and explain how the various class activities and requirements will promote the objectives.

At this point, you can now introduce your main assessment criteria (e.g., active class participation, balanced research) and explain how they are intended to help students monitor their progress. Assessment criteria should be flexible enough to allow students to explore their own interests but not so flexible that they cease to promote the objectives. Finally, your syllabus should explain how your marking is tied to your assessment criteria. The aim, overall, is to show the purpose behind your assessment and marking.

No doubt, assessment requires more than a clear class syllabus. It requires that instructors know where their students are starting from -- their initial viewpoints and motivations. It means checking to see if students really understand your criteria and what is expected of them by looking closely at their work.

One self-assessment technique is to have the students start a diary at the beginning of the course and write down reflections on their learning as the term proceeds.

Assessment also requires timely and constructive feedback on student work. When providing feedback, start your evaluation by addressing your main categories of assessment, stated in the syllabus. Assessment comments are most useful if they are constructive, suggesting ways that students can build upon their ideas.

Finally, instructors need to follow their own criteria. For example, if you expect students to discuss ideas in a respectful, balanced and well-reasoned manner, your own behaviour in class should reflect those values.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you develop an assessment policy: What is the purpose of my assessment? What am I assessing for, in this course? How can I maintain my standards while allowing different approaches to learning? How can I

communicate my idea of assessment to students, and engage them in the process? In short, we should ask ourselves the three basic questions of all teaching: What do I teach? How do I teach? Why do I teach?

The assessment process is not easy, and it will always involve some measure of student anxiety. But explicit procedures linked to course objectives will promote learning, prevent misunderstandings, and show that your assessment is as fair and appropriate as possible.

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## Media Ethics teaching workshop will be held before AEJMC convention in Miami

This year's AEJMC Pre-Convention Media Ethics Workshop takes place Aug. 6 at the Fontainebleau Hilton and Towers in Miami Beach. A variety of topics will be addressed, including presentations and discussions on:

- ◆ The state of journalism in the 21st century.
- ◆ Newsroom diversity.
- ◆ Teaching theory & methodology to undergraduates.
- ◆ Applied ethics.
- ◆ Undergraduate ethics courses.

- ◆ Advertising & public relations ethics.
- ◆ Philosophical models.
- ◆ Reporting in the aftermath of 9/11.
- ◆ Moral development.

Geared for first-time media ethics teachers and "seasoned" media ethicists alike, this year's workshop promises to have a global focus.

Admittance is on a first-come basis, and is limited to 30 attendees. The fee is \$50, which includes lunch. The workshop is likely to fill very quickly, and those inter-

ested in attending are strongly urged to register very soon. To reserve a spot, individuals should send their name, title, organizational affiliation, address, phone number, e-mail and a \$50 check (made out to AEJMC Media Ethics Division) to: Bill Babcock, Department of Journalism California State University 1250 Bellflower Blvd. SS/PA 008 Long Beach, CA 90840-4601

Those with additional questions should phone (562.985.4981) or e-mail (wbabcock@csulb.edu)

# A focus on outcomes enhances learning

**Deni Elliott**  
**Professional freedom & responsibility chair**

**O**utcomes. Many of my colleagues think that "outcomes" is a four-letter word. "Outcomes" indicates that the powers that wanna be, from the dean to the legislature, are out to show that professors are not doing their jobs.

The reasoning behind this fear seems logical, on its face. Teachers can teach without some students managing to learn. An untold number of variables from hours in the classroom to hours on the job to hours in the bar affect student performance. However, outcomes can be predicted and evaluated with the variables of real life in mind. Focus on outcomes is a friend to ethics teaching. A focus on outcomes changes the assessment of ethics teaching from the professor's ability to state course goals, like those provided by The Hastings Center in 1980, to the professor's ability to articulate how pre-professionals should look walking out the door at the end of the semester. A focus on outcomes helps professors describe to themselves, their colleagues and their students just why the ethics course or unit is imperative in the development of young professionals.

In a series of monographs and the comprehensive book, *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education*, Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok identified the following important goals in the teaching of ethics: The course should stimulate the students' moral imaginations, it should help students recognize ethical issues, it should elicit a sense of moral obligation, it should assist students in develop-

ing analytic skills, and it should provide them opportunities to tolerate, and reduce, disagreement and ambiguity.

Some of these goals are easy to turn into statements of student outcomes. Students can show that they recognize ethical issues by listing the ethical issues contained in a particular case study. Students can show that they have developed analytic skills by reasoning through a case in a manner that illustrates the principles of good inductive and deductive reasoning.

Unfortunately, this is where most evaluation in the ethics classroom ends. However, if our intent, as ethics professors, is to have students who walk out of the class as more aware, more committed and more creative

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moral agents - the intended outcome of the other Hasting Center goals - developing cognitive skills such as recognition and analytic reasoning is just the beginning.

Two connected changes from the traditional ethics class are necessary to bring about these more important student outcomes. First, along with the laundry list of ethical issues to be covered in the term, students need to focus on themselves as moral agents. If students are to focus on their own moral agency, they must have continual opportunities to observe and analyze themselves in decision-making that is in the present rather than in some hypothetical newsroom. They need opportunities to notice how their awareness and sense of responsibility has changed.

One way to begin is with a pre-test. The first week of the term, prior to any real instruction, I ask students to do a case analysis. The case always has essential concerns linked to course content, but also asks students to put themselves in a decision-

making mode that connects with their current lives. While the ethical issues may include professional concerns like conflict of interest, privacy, and deception, the situation for analysis is one students are likely to have experienced. The ethical issues arise as clearly in classroom interactions and relationships among peers as they do in the newsroom.

The pre-test asks students to identify ethical issues, to make choices and to describe, as completely as possible, the considerations that went into their decision-making. I collect the pre-tests and put them away until the end of the term.

Exercises throughout the term encourage students to identify ethical issues that they confront in their daily lives and to analyze their decisions and the reasoning behind those decisions. Alight-hearted "moral mistake of the day" provides students the opportunity to talk about a decision that they might make differently in the future and highlights the fact that we all make moral mistakes. We are all in the midst of our own moral growth and development. We cover the standard set of ethical issues, but always with a request that students think about when they have encountered these issues in their own lives.

The pre-test becomes their final exam. Students are asked to review their initial analysis and to discuss how they analyze the case differently at this point. What did they miss in the initial analysis that they notice now? How do they reason through their decisions differently? How do they assess the degree of their responsibility now as compared to the beginning of the term?

Successful students illustrate a deeper understanding of the ethical issues and concepts on the final as compared to the first attempt. They notice greater sensitivity in themselves to ethical concerns and are better able to describe their responsibilities. But, most importantly, they describe their greater level of self-awareness. The most important outcome for an ethics class is that students leave with a greater level of consciousness about themselves as decision-makers. If they are not able to describe what they have achieved, it is questionable whether they have achieved anything at all.

# Media ethics researchers must clarify legitimately held expectations of media

Researchers, from page 1

reporting. So far, so good. All three presenters were wrestling with what most of us would consider core questions in journalistic responsibility and accountability.

What became clear during the question-and-answer session, however, was how poorly we communicate those core questions and values to the public our scholarship is meant, ultimately, to serve. More troubling, perhaps, was the inkling I had that, even if we were to better explain those central issues, the public would not agree that they were so central. Let me offer an example or two.

The people who attended the media ethics session included some of the usual suspects, but a number of people from other professions and disciplines represented at the conference were there as well. In the discussion about whether “the media” could be considered a single moral agent, some of the news media folks asked how to make sense of the wide range of news organizations, mediums, and so forth that comprise “the media.” One of them – was it me? – said the notion seemed to imply some sort of orchestration of news coverage among disparate and far-flung media outlets. And then a non-media scholar joined the fray to ask just why the rest of us might consider such orchestration so impossible. Don’t newspapers, after all, publish many of the same stories, some of them word for word? Pressed for clarification, the questioner confirmed that she did, indeed, have some sense that “the media” collude in producing the news.

All of us are, no doubt, accustomed to hearing journalism conspiracy theories and dismissing them as benign ignorance or part of a general distrust of social institutions. To encounter that level of ignorance and dis-

trust among smart people who, presumably, would dismiss other conspiracy theories out of hand was depressing.

So what does this have to do with media ethics research? At least two things. First, I think it helps us to identify questions and problems that require our attention. We might wish to address, for example, whether and how journalistic responsibility extends to informing the public about how the news media operate. This strikes me as part of a larger question about how expectations of news media performance are constructed – by the news media as well as the public. To the extent that expectations represent promises, one might reasonably examine the moral components of making those promises, explaining why particular actions do or do not fulfill those promises, and how and why breaking promises is sometimes necessary. To be sure, public journalism scholarship has conceived of a more dialogic relationship between journalists and the public that would give each side a better understanding of the other. But even that dialogue may not completely address expectations, while creating new ones.

Beyond raising research questions, my

experience may serve to remind us that our work does not end with the analysis of a problem. What reasons, other than understanding and improving news media performance, do we have for launching critiques, undertaking research and teaching

moral analysis to communication students? Does our moral obligation extend to offering treatment, or does it end at diagnosis?

It is obvious by now what my own answers would be. And I realize, as I read over what I have just written, that my tone is perhaps more strident than it ought to be. Certainly we must be careful to avoid using the kind of righteous rhetoric that risks alienating the very people we mean to help. Studies have demonstrated that working journalists perceive ethics to be the province of the holier-than-thou set. Perhaps more research

directed at helping journalists better understand and explain their role to the public, at helping both journalists and the public make sense of their expectations, would help all of us – journalists, the public and academics – improve our performance.

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## Ethical Briefing

Send items for this column to:  
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### Reviewers still needed for Miami

The division is still in need of members willing to review papers submitted for presentation at the annual convention in August. If you can perform this service, please contact MED Research Chair Stephanie Craft at CraftS@missouri.edu.

### Newsletter notification

Members will be notified whenever this newsletter has been published electronically on the division's Web site ([http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc\\_ethics/LINKS/newsletter.html](http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/LINKS/newsletter.html)).

If you were notified by regular mail last time, that means we do not have a correct e-mail address for you. Please e-mail your information to the newsletter editor, Sandy Borden, at [sandra.borden@wmich.edu](mailto:sandra.borden@wmich.edu).

If you need to make other arrangements for obtaining a copy of the newsletter, contact Sandy at 616-387-3146 or Communication Department, Western Michigan University, 1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5318.

### Communication ethics conference info on the Web

A preliminary program and a registration form are available online for the Seventh National Communication Ethics Conference, to be held May 30-June 2 on the campus of Western Michigan University. Go to <http://www.wmich.edu/communication/ethics/>.

## MED on the Web



[http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc\\_ethics/home.html](http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/aejmc_ethics/home.html)

# Approach helps students deal with cross-cultural issues

Cross-cultural, from page 1

But the foundational aspects of the theory can help students approach conflicts in cross-cultural ethics.

A head covering may mean modesty, submission to God, submission to a spouse, or a presupposition of inferiority. An athlete drinking alcohol in an advertisement may indicate a simple product endorsement, the necessity to earn income after an early retirement, or the imposition of Western values on another culture. Understanding this theory helps students get past the tendency toward quick and dirty evaluations of "rightness and wrongness" based on their own cultural assumptions and the tendency to dismiss any ethical analysis because cultural differences may produce differences of opinion. It forces the student to look at the issue itself.

Milton J. Bennett's empathic listening theory helps students take the next step toward approaching conflict. Bennett advocates what he calls the Platinum Rule: Do unto others as they we do unto themselves. Certainly, there may be pitfalls to this rule, but it lays a foundation for his listening process:

◆ **Assume Differences.** Taking a sympathetic approach means you ask, "What would I do if I were in your situation." Milton suggests that sympathy is inappropriate because you are not in the others' situation. Know that your experience is different.

◆ **Know Self.** Know where you end and other people begin. Know your own val-

ues, thoughts, and beliefs so that the next step is possible.

◆ **Suspend Self.** Temporarily let go of your own identity; your own boundaries more or less expand to leave you open to others' experiences.

◆ **Allow Guided Imagination.** Become lost in another person's story. Allow your imagination to be captured by someone else's experience. This is not unlike what happens when watching a movie in a dark theater.

◆ **Allow Empathic Experience.** See not only through the others' eyes, but also

through their experiences and cultures. Look not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

◆ **Re-establish Self.** Return to your own self and your own experiences.

The rejection of the Golden Rule and sympathy as a foundation for cross-cultural analysis and moving toward the Platinum Rule and empathy offers students both theory and a tool for information gathering.

Students have the opportunity to discover just how open they are to having other cultures evaluate their own and whether they want other cultures to advocate for change in their world.

Students then can better decide whether they want to adopt a true relativist position or advocate for change. Most important, students have the opportunity to discover just how open they are to having other cultures evaluate their own and whether they want other cultures to advocate for change in their world.

**Suggested reading:** *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings* edited by Milton J. Bennett. (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Communication Press, 1998).

## Media Ethics on the Web: course syllabi to peruse

Below is a listing of online course materials offered by some teachers of media ethics. If you are viewing this page while your computer is connected to the Internet, simply click on the URLs to jump to the pages (the hyperlink feature only works in Adobe Acrobat).

**Tom Bivins, University of Oregon**

<http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/J397/>  
<http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/J644/home.html>  
<http://jcomm.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/J412/J412.html>

**James Tidwell, Eastern Illinois University (includes online readings)**

<http://www.ux1.eiu.edu/~cfjat/classes/4102/syllabus.html>

**Eric Bishop, University of La Verne**

<http://www.ulaverne.edu/~comms/courses/jrtv467.htm>

**Paul Lester, Fullerton, (Includes list of other ethics courses online)**

<http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/ethics/ethcourses.html>

**Tom Brislin, University of Hawaii**

<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tbrislin/460syl.html>

**Bourne Morris, University of Nevada-Reno**

<http://www.unr.edu/journalism/syl.205.morris.html>  
<http://www.unr.edu/journalism/pro.school.sp.syl205.html>

**Elizabeth Hansen, Eastern Kentucky University**

<http://www.communication.eku.edu/Hansen/COM%20415/COM415Hansen.html>

**Michael Bugeja, Ohio University**

<http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~bugeja/Ethics.htm>

**Ang Peng Hwa, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

<http://www.medialaw.com.sg/>

**Denis Herrick, University of New Mexico**

<http://www.users.qwest.net/~journ/>

**Bill Barrett, Webster University**

<http://www.webster.edu/~barrettb/ethicsmedia.htm>

**Phil Meyer, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill**

<http://www.unc.edu/~pmeyer/Syl141.htm>

Send items for the next issue of **Ethical News** to: Sandra L. Borden, newsletter editor: [sandra.borden@wmich.edu](mailto:sandra.borden@wmich.edu)

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