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Ideas R Us

Do you have a teaching idea or question you'd like to see in the Newsletter or on the website? Would you like to "poll" MED members on some aspect of teaching? Send your ideas to our Teaching Chair and she'll try to pursue them in future issues. Examples might include: teaching ethics to large classes, using the Socratic method in teaching ethics, tips for grading and assessment in ethics education and more. What's "trending" in your brain? Contact Jan Leach at jleach1@kent.edu or phone 330-672-4289.

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Ethical News: Spring 2013 • Volume 16, No. 3

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Jack Breslin's tribute to Donald Gillmor, late of the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Reprinted by kind permission of the author and Jane E. Kirtley, Director of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law.

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***Editor's note:** The following two articles are presented in tribute to John C. Merrill, late of the University of Missouri School of Journalism. They are a humorous "exchange of ideas" between Merrill and Thomas W. Cooper of Emerson College around the idea of "message energits." In Cooper's words: "John had a hidden side which most people don't know about. John wrote a spoof of all the pseudo-scientific articles being coined in our field perhaps 20 years ago and I wrote a counter-spoof deploring Merrill's spoof as it was taken seriously. John eventually published his spoof – but in an obscure way long ago that most of our group would not know about. I never published my spoof but sent it to John instead and he enjoyed it."*

Message Energits: Propellants and Stimulants of Communication

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"Brand Journalism," "Non-Traditional Journalism," and More!

by **Bastiaan Vanacker**
Division Head



On April 5, for the fourth time in the last five years, I made the 150-mile trip from Chicago to Madison to attend the Journalism Conference organized by the Center for Journalism Ethics at the SJMC of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The one-day (free!) conference combines perspectives from academics, working journalists, and media management on ethical issues in a unique way, making it well worth the two-and-a-half hour drive.

Each time I have attended the conference, I have returned with new insights and teaching ideas. I have successfully used [this](#) session from the 2009 conference moderated by Lee Wilkins in my classroom. This year's conference entitled "Who is Shaping the News?" was no exception (full disclosure: I could not attend the keynote speech by Lowell Bergman and the Anthony Shadid award presentation to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel journalist Mark Johnson.) Below you'll find a sampling of some of the issues discussed throughout the day. Space and

time constraints prevent me from giving a fuller overview of this conference, but it all should be [online](#) soon.

The opening panel focused on "brand journalism," the relatively new concept to describe efforts of marketers to connect directly with their audiences. More and more companies and organizations, from the Smithsonian to the University of Wisconsin's athletic department to Red Bull hire journalists to provide them with content. This allows organizations to have a direct line of communication with their customers and nurture the love affair Americans have developed with their favorite brands, who tend to score higher on most trust indexes than the news media.

Brand journalism's stories resemble journalistic products both in style and content and are not necessary tailored to advertise a product. In that sense, this type of communication is not your typical PR or advertising message, but is it journalism? The amount of research involved and quality of the product at times is impressive, as anyone who has seen Red Bull's coverage of Felix Baumgartner space jump will have to admit.

While some of brand journalism's content may measure up well against what is produced in many newsrooms today, it is of course still paid for, preventing the journalist to be truly independent. This is an important issue to bring up with students. Many of our journalism majors may end up taking up these types of jobs and while there is nothing unethical *per se* in doing so, we should prepare them in our classrooms for the potential ethical dilemmas this new type of "journalism" presents.

The second panel of the day discussed another example of journalism being practiced in non-traditional settings, the non-profit newsroom, particularly the non-profit newsroom located inside academia. The discussion veered away at times from the ethical issue to focus on the practical hurdles to be cleared when setting up non-profit newsrooms in collaboration with an academic institution, but these practical concerns ("Does the university code of conduct apply to these newsrooms?") do have ethical implications. Furthermore, as [Karl Idsvoog](#), from Kent State University argued, recent scandals in university sports programs have indicated that universities also are ethically compromised in many ways and do not always like to shine a cold hard light on themselves. It was clear from the presentation that for all the panelists (who were all involved or familiar with projects of this nature) independence (from donors or host institutions) was a *conditio sine qua non* to forge ahead.

A larger concern, and one that I think conference organizer Stephen Ward tried to make by scheduling these session close together, is that the audience is faced with an increasingly complex media system. How is the audience supposed to differentiate between a story written by [former newspaper sports columnist](#) who now provides content for the University of Wisconsin and a story that appears on the website of the non-profit WisconsinWatch.org, which collaborates with the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism & Mass Communication? The institutional and editorial environment in which these stories appear is different, but can audience members continue to make these distinctions? Beyond the narrow concerns of how these non-profits can truly be independent and transparent (a [topic](#) at the 2011 conference) these larger questions also need to be addressed.

Of the three early afternoon sessions, I chose to attend the session conducted by the SPJ UW-Madison chapter on how to maintain ethical standards amid "bloggers, partisans, and haters." The jump-off point for the discussion was the Kyle Wood story, yet another example from the cesspool Wisconsin politics seems to have become recently. Late last year, Kyle Wood, a volunteer for a GOP hopeful in Wisconsin's (very liberal) 2nd Congressional District, claimed he had been attacked in his apartment by opponents because of his sexual and political orientation. The story quickly fell apart and Wood admitted to making everything up, but not before his allegations had been printed in a number of media outlets.

Panelist Matt Kittle, bureau chief of the *Wisconsin Reporter* (an independent watchdog journalism initiative affiliated with the Franklin Center) was one of the reporters who had been duped by Wood and gave an honest account of how he had been burned by his source and why he thought at the time the story was credible ([here](#) you'll find commentary by Kittle on the case and its fall-out).

During the Q&A, an audience member pressed Kittle on one of the reasons he had given for awarding credence to the story, namely that there was a police report on the case. Kittle responded that a police report legitimizes an allegation and allows a reporter to report the facts as registered by the police. This exchange gave way to an interesting discussion about procedures to verify information. Unfortunately, the larger issue addressed by this question, the media's institutional bias toward official sources, remained unaddressed.

The day concluded with a panel on new avenues for media critics to take down journalists who produce stories they disagree with. The conference came full circle when Scott Cohn, senior producer with CNBC, lambasted [Way Forward Media](#) for the [response piece](#) it had produced for Remington to his [report](#) on safety concerns with their famed model-700 series rifle. Echoing the discussion of the opening panel of the day, he called Way Forward Media out for presenting themselves on their web page as journalists, which he claimed they were not.

My only criticism of this conference is that panelists tended to agree too much and avoid debate. I had hoped for a spirited reply from crisis manager Kennan Wood from Wood Communications Group. Unfortunately, he tended to agree with Cohn on many of his criticisms, and we were deprived of a much-anticipated showdown between journalism and crisis communication. I do not intend this to be taken as a criticism of Wood, however, as his answers reflected a deep awareness that a potential client's satisfaction is not the only ethical obligation of a crisis communication professional.

This conference also was the last one with MED member Stephen Ward at the helm, as Ward is moving west to become director of the George S. Turnbull Portland Center at the University of Oregon. A new director will be appointed soon and for the sake of our discipline, we can only hope that (s)he will be successful in continuing the center's mission.

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AEJMC statement chides White House for aggressive prosecution of press leakers

by **Matt J. Duffy**
PF&R Chair

The president of AEJMC, Kyu Ho Youm, recently [released](#) a statement chastising the current administration's approach to prosecuting press leaks.

It's an important statement because President Obama is taking an unprecedented tack with the historically common act of leaking secret information to the press. Our group — obviously concerned with protecting good journalism and public accountability — should not remain silent while this happens. Many observers are quite surprised that Obama — who promised to be transparent and more open in dealing with the press — appears to be no different than his predecessor.

For the average person, the value of leaking classified information to the press is lost. However, most "big stories" that uncover government abuse and waste came to the press by way of an anonymous whistleblower who leaked the information—sometimes even classified information. The statement opens:

"The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) is committed to freedom of speech and the press in the United States and abroad. AEJMC believes that this commitment must include a free exchange of information and ideas, even some information that the U.S. government considers or wishes to be 'secret.' The Pentagon Papers, Watergate, the Iran-Contra affair and the existence of clandestine CIA prisons are examples in which secret government information was leaked to and publicized by the news media. In these and in many other cases, the dissemination of secret information served a greater good to American society by informing the public and by allowing for a needed debate on the ethics of secret government policies and covert actions. We believe that a democracy shrouded in secrecy encourages corruption, and



we agree, as JUSTICE LOUIS D. BRANDeis of the U.S. Supreme Court said, 'sunlight is the best disinfectant.'"

The statement then goes on to outline the current approach:

"AEJMC, therefore, calls attention to the current administration's zeal in prosecuting those in government who leak secret information. Only three times in its first 92 years was the Espionage Act of 1917 used to prosecute government officials for leaking secret information to the press. However, the current administration has already brought six charges under this Act. The accused in all of these cases appear to represent whistleblowers, not those engaged in attempted espionage for foreign governments that 'aid the enemy.'"

The statement makes the point that there's a huge difference between giving information to an enemy spy and leaking it to the press — at least if you live in a democracy where press freedom is seen as an important check on the power of the government. The statement continues, specifically pointing to one prosecution in particular:

"We caution that the prosecution of U.S. Army Pfc. Bradley Manning, who released a trove of secret data to the WikiLeaks website, appears to be excessively punitive, with a chilling effect on a democracy's requisite freedom of speech and the press. The release of this information advanced and clarified public debate on the morality of U.S. policy. Some observers even suggest that the honest (albeit secret) diplomatic assessments of Middle Eastern regimes helped spark the Arab Spring. Pfc. Bradley Manning has already admitted in military court that he did break the law through his actions. But to accuse him of 'aiding the enemy' is egregious, given his credible stated intentions and the global breadth of the dissemination. The government's current approach toward leak prosecutions sends a message to the rest of the world that the United States' actions are not fully aligned with its stated 'exceptional' commitment to freedom of speech and the press as a human right."

This is a great point. As someone who's lived abroad, I can attest that the United States is judged by its actions, not its intentions. Americans shouldn't go around lecturing the world about the value of a free press and then prosecute an important part of its function at home. The statement concludes with suggestion for future action:

"Therefore, in recognition of the historical benefits of leaked information to our nation and to the principles and values of democracy, in particular the freedom of speech and the press, AEJMC calls on the U.S. government to make prosecutions as rare as possible, to consider the credible intent of the accused in these prosecutions, and to seek punishment that is proportionate and commensurate, not only with credible intent, but also with resulting harm and benefit to our democracy, its principles and values. Furthermore, we ask that prosecutors consider reviewing existing press leak cases in light of the public good and the First Amendment. AEJMC believes that this will ensure an environment in which the public will continue to be served through the occasional leaking of secret information by those whose credible intent was the public good."

Note that the statement doesn't call for the absolute prohibition of prosecution of press leaks — however, we certainly feel that they should be far more rare than they are right now.

The president of AEJMC, the presidential advisory committee, and the Professional Freedom and Responsibility chairs of each division helped draft the statement.

I'm proud that we as a group are speaking out strongly for press freedom and that we live in a country where such speech is protected and valued.

Dr. Matt J. Duffy teaches journalism at Georgia State University where he is a fellow with the Center for International Media Education. Follow him on Twitter: [@mattjduffy](#).

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Announcements

Media Ethics Teaching and Trauma

by **Ginny Whitehouse**

The Media Ethics Division and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma will co-sponsor a pre-convention workshop designed to give seasoned professors and new instructors tools to address the realities of trauma for their students. Nationally recognized author and Columbia University Professor Ari Goldman will help faculty identify essential competencies for students reporting on trauma. Ethics scholar Lee Wilkins will help faculty consider the ethics of deadline reporting for student journalists. Former America's Most Wanted publicist and media ethics professor Jack Breslin will explore reality TV's impact on students' understanding of trauma and violence.

The pre-convention workshop will be held from 12:30 to 6 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 7, 2013, at the AEJMC main convention site, the Renaissance Washington, D.C.

Registration is limited to 30; cost is \$50, \$40 for graduate students. Please sign up for this workshop when registering for the AEJMC conference. For additional information, contact Ginny Whitehouse at ginny.whitehouse@eku.edu.

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Comics in the Classroom

by **Jan Leach**
Teaching Chair

Comic books in the classroom? Maybe for a course in popular culture, politics or art illustration. But in an ethics class? Yes!

A series of comic books written, drawn and posted by MED's Tom Bivins presents basic theory and well-known philosophers in a comic magazine format using clever characters, straightforward text and a liberal sprinkling of "wisdom" from Mark Twain.

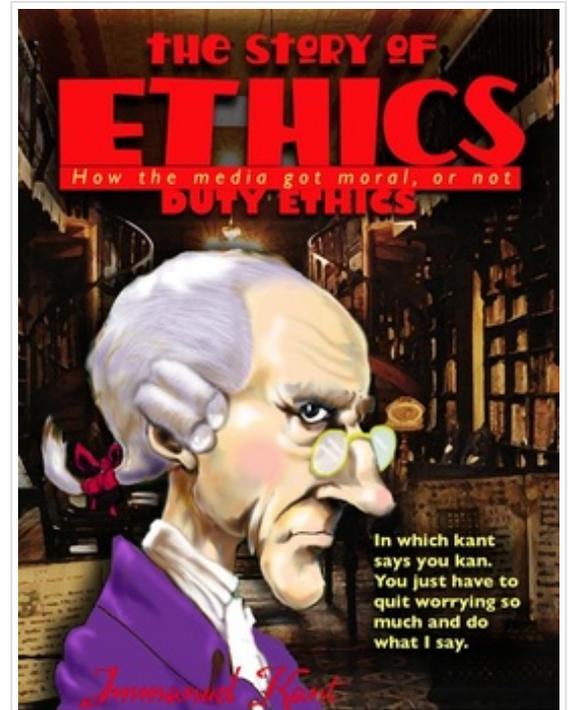
Bivins is the John L. Hulteng Chair in Media Ethics in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon in Eugene. He is the head of the communication studies major and the graduate certificate program in communication ethics.

Before academia, Bivins worked in radio, television, advertising, public relations, and as a graphic designer and editorial cartoonist. He never lost the creative urge from his days as a cartoonist in Alaska, so he started writing and drawing the ethics comics three years ago to encourage student interest and participation.

"My lectures and my comic books are my creative outlet; I couldn't do a straight lecture because it isn't me," Bivins says. "If I couldn't use humor and crack jokes it wouldn't be me."

Now the comics are a staple in Bivins's classes along with his textbook: *Mixed Media: Moral Distinctions in Advertising, Public Relations and Journalism* (Routledge, 2009). The ethics comics – 13 so far – are a backup to Bivins's lectures.

"If a student misses a lecture he can go to the comics and get everything. They're also a good way to study because everything (covered in class) is there," Bivins says.



And what *is* there, exactly? First in the series is an eight-page magazine titled “The Story of Ethics, How the media got moral, or not,” which covers basic terms, definitions and the difference between normative, applied and meta-ethics. The introduction is accurate and easy-to-understand. Each page includes delightful, and thoughtful, cartoon illustrations. At the end, Bivins’s favorite character, Mark Twain, sums things up with a quote.

“I’ve always been a huge fan of Mark Twain,” Bivins says. “I just like the way he’s able to say something serious with humor, especially about ethics.”

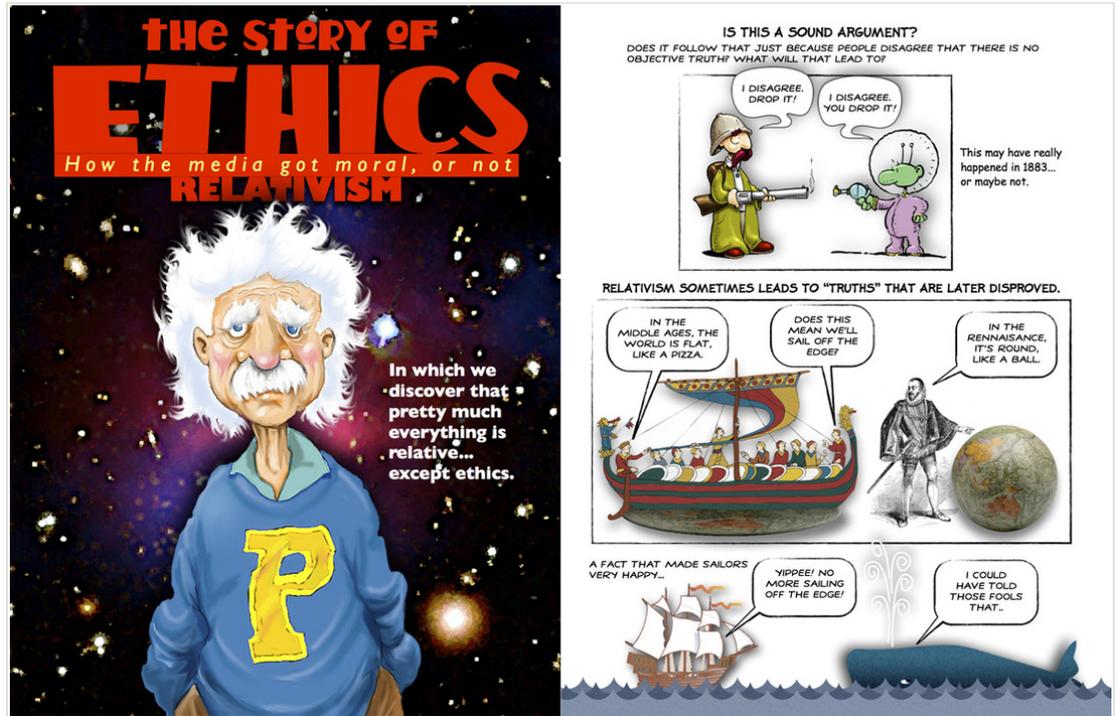
Additional ethics comic books focus on topics such as Media and Democracy, Duty-Based Theory, Consequential Theory, Virtue Ethics, Privacy and more. Each comic book features an original cover illustration; inside the ethics topics are covered in a succinct, yet humorous, way.

Bivins says the ethics content is compiled from many sources, including encyclopedias and clips. He double-checks everything for accuracy and makes corrections when things rendered in comic book form don’t make sense to him.

The actual illustrations take some time, Bivins says. He draws most of the covers by hand and does the coloring and shading in Painter and PhotoShop computer programs. Bivins designs the comic books with Apple Pages software. Bivins’s brother, Chris, a graphic designer and artist, also contributed cartoons and drew the “Ethics Man” character for the cover for the comic book on Media and Harm.

Illustrating and writing the ethics comic books takes time but Bivins says he’ll add more to the collection. He started with five or six comic books during summer break three years ago and has added two or three each summer since, including new ones featuring John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hobbes that were created just last year.

He also produced the ethics comic book on relativism last summer. It features an image of Albert Einstein wearing a rumpled blue sweater with a big yellow “P,” for Princeton, on the front.



Cover and sample page of the comic on ethical relativism

Bivins wants to do three or four more ethics comic books focusing on advertising ethics, morally offensive content and other topics. For now, though, the ethics comic books are popular with Bivins's students and he is happy to share them with MED members.

Find Tom Bivins's media ethics comic books at his course website:

<http://j397mediaethics.weebly.com/index.html>. The ethics comic books themselves are at: <http://j397mediaethics.weebly.com/ethics-comics.html>.

You can contact Bivins at tbivins@uoregon.edu.

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My Substitute Semester

by **Michael Bugeja**

It began with a vivid dream, in which REM sleep metamorphoses into the awakened conscience, providing a vision of what will or ought to be. In reality, I had a class to teach in five hours. However, at 4 a.m., the hallucinatory dream-realm seemed more real to me than irrational: Benjamin Franklin had visited me with a message for a student in media ethics.

Any teacher, let alone administrator, who would publicize such a visitation, is due for sabbatical or retirement. I get that. But this was an extraordinary time for me. A colleague had passed away suddenly, and I had volunteered to take her class. As a journalism director, I had no classroom responsibilities. The last time I taught media ethics was spring 2003 in my last quarter at Ohio University, where I worked before taking the Iowa State University position.

This is an account of what began as a dream and ended as an affirmation about the importance of higher education.

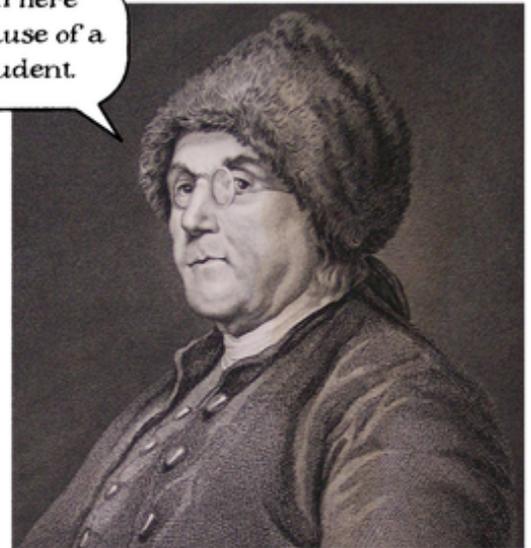
In the asynchronous landscape of the conscience, I did not meet the historic Ben Franklin with ponytail and coonskin cap. History is insignificant in the absence of time. Reputation is not.

Imagine learning without warning that a powerful or an influential person — Angela Merkel, say, or Nelson Mandela — was en route to your home. What would be the first thing on your mind?

I had to clean the house. Hence began the whirr of imagery dusting, washing dishes, vacuuming, as the doorbell rang like a school bell, or liberty bell maybe, now that I think of it.

In a blink, the house was clean and Franklin across from me. "I have an important message for

I'm here
because of a
student.



one of your students. She is going to change the country."

"Mr. Franklin," I said — yes, I called him that — "I am grateful for your visit."

"You have nothing to do with it. I'm here because of a student. I have three words for her."

He shared them, and I awoke bedazzled and apprehensive.

I entered Room 169 in Hamilton Hall. The class was still grieving the loss of one of Iowa State's most iconic professors, Barbara Mack, who died on Aug. 23 after teaching the first two sessions of media ethics. (See "24 Hours" about the shock of her passing.)

Not only was I replacing a beloved professor, in the eyes of my students I was the quintessential administrator with no classroom experience and with antiquated lectures of the pre-digital age. Worse, I had substituted the existing syllabus of Professor Mack with one of my own, containing more philosophy than newsroom practice. (I would adjust for that by requiring the class to do an online media portfolio with personal ethics statement.)

Instinctively I knew I had to gain students' trust, and that's when I decided to share with them my Franklin dream.

I still recall the puzzled looks of 65 students. I pressed on, sharing common knowledge about Franklin as journalist and highlighting his contribution to virtue ethics.

When he was 20, about the age of my students, he devised an ethical plan to shape his life, espousing the virtues of "resolution" (promise keeping), "tranquility" (serenity during incivility), "frugality," "industry," "sincerity," "justice," "moderation" and, above all, "humility."

All of those virtues are practiced still in Iowa, known for its work ethic.

I told them my dream and those three important words: "Read, read, read."

After lecture, I returned to my office and read several e-mails from women who felt that Franklin was speaking directly to them. They knew they were going to make a difference, and this was some sort of affirmation from the beyond.

That was the first inkling that times had changed. I thought students would be more skeptical.

Here is one such e-mail: "I meant to come in to talk to you today, and actually bumped into you in the Daily newsroom, but you seemed to be all over the place doing business, so I decided to e-mail you instead.... I would like to give you some background on your Benjamin Franklin dream in saying he was probably speaking about me!"

About a dozen students in media ethics also worked for our independent newspaper, the Daily. Barbara Mack was on the publication board. I was going to forward those e-mails to her when I remembered she was no longer with us. Or maybe like Franklin, she was, in spirit.

Instead, I shared the e-mails with our office manager, Kathy Box. She said something that rang true about our role as teachers. "We should approach every class believing there are students who will change the world for the better."

Over the course of the semester, those students changed me. Keep in mind it had been a decade since I had taught this class. There were no smartphones then. A small percentage of the typical campus had wireless in 2003. Now technology has exploded with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype and omnipresent media and blogs that are part of the modern classroom and our lives.

During the first few weeks, some students were wary about my teaching methods emphasizing reading. Whereas Barbara Mack, a lawyer (and you need to be if you dare do this) confiscated smartphones if students used them during lecture, I paid them no heed whatsoever. "Text away," I said, asking students to sit in rows nearest the exit if they wanted to network socially. These were "liberty seats," allowing students to come and go as they pleased. "It's your tuition dollar."

At first, a dozen or so students embraced that policy, believing it was lenient, until the midterm. At Iowa State, professors must report to the registrar all those students earning a C- or lower. Out of the 65, I reported a third of the class — a fair distribution of grades, I thought. To students, this was alarming. Many needed media ethics for graduation. They couldn't just drop the class without setting themselves back careerwise and financially.

Ah, the beauty of extra credit! I had forgotten about that, too, in addition to grade inflation. Students could earn points reading, writing and attending guest lectures, presentations and forums. Moreover, I told them, they could earn more credit if their online portfolios wowed me. This was an opportunity for seniors to work for themselves and create a project that would help them secure a job upon graduation.

To be honest, though, some stereotypes about today's digital natives were true, initially at least. For instance, I posted all of my lectures, journal exercises, recordings, videos and presentations on "myethicsclass.com" — interesting, isn't it, that I could buy that domain? I also posted reviews for exams whose answers were available 24/7 via Internet. (After the abysmal midterm exam, students realized the importance of "read, read, read.")

While students consumed technology, many in the class did not know basic HTML or CSS. I had to create a slideshow tutorial to help them with final projects. I also scheduled one-on-one advising sessions to fix glitches in their online portfolios, using the computer as an excuse to interact with and get to know students interpersonally.

They did have trouble thinking critically. I had not fully anticipated how much this skill had been undermined by technology, which tends to provide answers rather than processes. I went as far as giving "critical thinking" prizes every time a student correctly applied an ethics tenet. Throughout the semester, I gave only four such prizes — a personalized pad and pen.

Students made up for lack of critical thinking with a keen visual sense and entrepreneurial talent, as evidenced in their ethics portfolios.

What surprised me in my substitute semester was how efficient teaching had become because of technology, if one knows how to use it for educational purposes.

In a few weeks I managed an entire course revision, updating lectures and using search engines, online libraries and databanks to find everything that I needed at a mere click of a button — something my students had mastered but occasionally misused, not being able to tell critically the veracity or authenticity of a site.

Better still, I didn't have to pay travel expenses for experts to speak to my classes, affirming my lectures and lessons. I could Skype them in to do just that. For instance I called on Jeffrey Howe, a former media ethics student at Ohio and now an assistant professor at Northeastern University, to critique students' online ethics portfolio. (Howe also writes for Wired and is creator of the concept of "crowdsourcing," also discussed in my class.)

I could provide links to news shows and historic moments and then show them in class. Discussing the power of the conscience, we viewed a journalism video on YouTube about "Tank Man," who stopped a line of tanks during the 1989 student uprising at Tiananmen Square.

A Chinese student in ethics class had never seen the Tank Man video before. "This is why I came to study in America," she said.

Later in the semester I showed a powerful CNN video about the Kent State uprising. Several of my American students had never heard about this before, especially as told through the eyes of the student journalists who covered the fatal shootings in 1970.

Another of my Chinese students remarked about the similarities between Tiananmen and Kent State uprisings. (She got a critical thinking pad and pen, by the way.)

I could check stats on the class blog to see how many students were reading posts. I could communicate with them throughout the week, using social networks and Blackboard, commenting on current affairs and sending links to augment times in class when questions arose or tangents were taken.

Case in point: We were studying the concept of "freedom of conscience" when I mentioned the bravery of 22-year-old Sophie Scholl, part of a journalism resistance group, "The White Rose," that harangued Nazis in World War II with philosophy-based newsletters about social justice.

I provided links to her life and then purchased from Amazon several copies of the DVD, "Sophie Scholl — The Final Days." Several students checked out the video and others found it on Netflix.

A transfer student who watched clips from the movie confessed that Scholl made her feel insignificant because she wanted to be as brave as her and make a contribution to society, although she doubted she would ever do so.

"Remember the Franklin dream," I told her. "He could have been speaking about you."

She smiled in recognition.

That gave me an idea. In time for the next class I acquired a 1787 coin that Franklin purportedly designed, the "Fugio" cent, and passed it around the class. "You are holding history," I said. Then we explicated mottos on the coin whose obverse inscription, "Fugio," is Latin for "I flee," referring to the blink of linear time. The obverse has another motto — "Mind your business" — which symbolizes "industry" and also bespeaks the entrepreneurial genius of today's students. The reverse has 13 interlocking links, representing the original colonies, with the inscription, "We are one." This affirms unity.

At that moment, teacher and students were one, thanks again to Benjamin Franklin.

When the term ended, many students met their grading goals by attending extra-credit events. Fewer than 10 students earned C- to F, a typical distribution.

I will keep teaching media ethics. My substitute semester helped me understand the challenges and needs of faculty. I will do all I can to provide resources.

As for dreams, my Franklin visitation probably says more about me than about teaching. However, his message about reading is as essential as ever if we are to help students realize their own dreams and contribute more to society.

In my substitute semester I learned there is still no substitute for that.

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