

# COURSE SYLLABUS



## Course Title:

## Media Ethics

**Course code:** JRN 352

**Term and year:** Fall, 2021

**Day and time:** On Wednesdays, 18.30-21.15

**Lecturer:** Nenad Pejic

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**Consultations hours:** Before class, anytime by email, text, What's App; phone call by arrangement

<b>Language of instruction</b>	English	<b>Level</b>	Intermediate
<b>Credits US/ECTS</b>	3/6	<b>Prerequisite</b>	None
<b>Length</b>	15 weeks		
<b>Contact hours</b>	42 hours	<b>Course type</b>	JC Required, HSC, PS, Elective

### 1. Course Description

The right to free speech, as guaranteed in the United States Constitution, is the best-known underpinning for a democratic nation in the world. But does that guarantee mean you can say or write anything? And if not, why not? The simple answer is that it would not be ethical and has potential for negative consequences.

Ethics are not unique to the media. They are taught in every profession, even in a every nondemocratic country. But nowhere are they more important than in journalism. And at no time are they more important than now. The market economy, the pressure by those in power, business interests and digital technology all challenge media ethics.

Media ethics are not limited to political news. Ethics play a crucial role in advertising and public relations as well. Misleading in marketing and communication also can have terrible consequences. Digital technology and social media introduce new challenges in media, marketing and communication. Today, videos have more influence than text and, therefore, this course will address media ethics in video production as well.

Pseudo-news outlets and bots spread harmful misinformation repeatedly shared on Facebook and other social media. They confuse the audience and help in creating a “post-truth” society. In such environments, the media outlets have been struggling to maintain ethics in journalism, making compromises for the sake of profit, interest, or politics.

The course will discuss the key ethical rules in media, advertising, and communication. We will analyze the application of ethics to real world situations in media news coverage, advertising, and public relations.

## **2. Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course students will have a clear understanding of and practical experience in:

- Understanding and using the broad ethical principles, which drive all professional media, particularly journalism in all its forms.
- There are around 400 codes of ethics in the world. Students will become familiar with Reuters, RTDNA, SPJ and BBC Codes of Ethics, which underpin most journalistic practices in the US and other democratic countries.
- Understanding the importance of storytelling in communication and advertising as well as journalism.
- Understanding the difference between truth, fact, and opinion - and how and when to use each in journalism, advertising and communication
- Identifying misinformation and unethical practices, defining methodology for recognizing fake news, recognizing misuse of videos
- Using critical thinking to recognize how social media can amplify the harmful effects of misinformation and distortion.
- Understanding how ethics may be broadly applied in public relations and business in general.
- Using critical thinking to become not just an ethical journalist but also an ethical human being.

## **3. Required Reading Material:**

### Required Material:

- RTDNA (Radio Television Digital News Association) Code of Ethic, <https://www.rtdna.org/>
- SPJ (Society of Professional Journalists), <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- Reuters Hand Book on Journalism, [http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Standards\\_and\\_Values](http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Standards_and_Values)
- BBC editorial guideline, <https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines>

## Recommended Material:

- Media ethics cases in 2020, <https://mediaengagement.org/vertical/media-ethics/research/category/case-studies/>
- Media ethics case studies, <https://www.spj.org/ethicscasestudies.asp>
- Nenad Pejic: Journalism in time of crisis and conflict, we cannot plead innocence, [https://www.academia.edu/44112718/JOURNALISM\\_IN\\_TIME\\_OF\\_CRISIS\\_AND\\_CONFLICT\\_WE\\_CAN\\_NOT\\_PLEAD\\_INNOCENCE](https://www.academia.edu/44112718/JOURNALISM_IN_TIME_OF_CRISIS_AND_CONFLICT_WE_CAN_NOT_PLEAD_INNOCENCE)
- At each lecture, students will be recommended to read an article related to the respective topic.

### 3. Teaching methodology

Lectures and discussions. Each class will start with a summary of the previous class, followed by new cases students recognized based on their own research or recommended articles to read. The case studies will be regular. In addition, the students will be solving ethical dilemmas in journalism, advertising, and communication. Students will, occasionally, be divided in groups and asked to make a presentation on the topic addressed. They will be given examples from the media or have the freedom to choose their own topic.

For the midterm, students will work on an essay (2000 words maximum).

The final exam will address the key issues that were discussed. The students will be asked to write up a case study (4500 words maximum).

### 4. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda	
Session 1 Sept. 1	<p><b>Topic:</b> An introduction to the course, including the aim, structure, and participation expected from students</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Media’s task to inform and educate. What is news? What drives news coverage? Where do ethics fit in? Why do journalists need them? Ethics, journalism, and propaganda. Are media ethics in decline? Ethics are more than human rights. Do we more often fail the “inform” or the “educate” part? Introduce Codes of Ethics, triangle between news, context, and culture. Broadcast ethics.</p> <p><b>Assignments (next class):</b> The decline in media standards cannot be exaggerated  <a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-decline-in-media-standards-cannot-be-exaggerated-1.191085">https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/the-decline-in-media-standards-cannot-be-exaggerated-1.191085</a></p> <p><b>Optional supplemental reading:</b> The New Media Ethics: Journalism has never been respectable, but journalists should have self-respect.  <a href="https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2018/09/06/the-new-media-ethics-journalism-has-never-been-respectable-but-journalists-should-have-self-respect-guest-blog-first-in-a-series/">https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2018/09/06/the-new-media-ethics-journalism-has-never-been-respectable-but-journalists-should-have-self-respect-guest-blog-first-in-a-series/</a></p>	
Sept 8	<b>NO CLASS TODAY</b>	
Session 2 Sept. 15	<p><b>Topic:</b> The five pillars of media ethics: independence, accuracy, humanity, impartiality, and accountability.</p>	

	<p><b>Description:</b> Two extremes: misinforming and pleading innocence. The Fairness Doctrine and why it was discontinued. Journalism in “seeking the truth business” are faced with “how to interpret truth”. Storytelling vs. story selling. What if a lie saves lives? Misrepresenting yourself to get a story. When is it allowed for a journalist to misrepresent themselves? Using the internet for fact-checking, confirmation of information, well-sourced information. What are sources and how are they used? What solutions have various countries introduced in fighting fake news? What about objectivity?</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> UN, Doha summit, Media Integrity and Ethics  <a href="https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/integrity-ethics/module-10/key-issues.html">https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/integrity-ethics/module-10/key-issues.html</a></p>	
<p>Session 3  Sept. 22</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Money, audience, owner, truth</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Media independence as an ethical principle. Independence from whom - power, audience, source or money? Media concentration. Industry of fake news vs. industry of truth. Reporting a crime, atrocities or war. Limits in war reporting. Lack of time, rushing to publish and sensationalism as an enemy to ethics. Is “slow journalism” a solution? Is neutrality a precondition for objectivity? How to stay neutral? Media ethics and neutrality. Defending values or staying uninvolved? Hate speech and its consequences. Five points to check regarding hate speech. Media credibility lasts longer than regimes.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> How Media Ownership Matters in US: Beyond the Concentration  <a href="https://www.cairn.info/revue-societes-contemporaines-2019-1-page-71.htm">https://www.cairn.info/revue-societes-contemporaines-2019-1-page-71.htm</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma, No. 1</p>	
<p>Session 4,  Sept. 24  FRIDAY  MAKE UP  CLASS</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Media ethics and elections, reporting for whom?</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Relations between media, political parties and audience. Journalism vs. Activism. Misuse of media and misuse of live interviews. Labeling and media reactions. Insulting vs. insulting in media. Avoiding offensive words does not mean avoiding naming correct expressions. Ethical use of camera shots and in reporting details. Virtual journalism. Ethical checklist for robot journalism. Online war, spinning as a practice. Regulating “Digital Wild West”. Each Internet user is a journalist today. Social media vs. traditional media. Social media: from the kingdom of freedom to the kingdom of slavery. Ethics in digital journalism vs. traditional journalism.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Why Ethics Matter for social media?  <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/rob-dube/2021/01/14/why-ethics-matter-for-social-media-silicon-valley-and-every-tech-industry-leader/?sh=40ce76bb16f2">https://www.forbes.com/sites/rob-dube/2021/01/14/why-ethics-matter-for-social-media-silicon-valley-and-every-tech-industry-leader/?sh=40ce76bb16f2</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma, No. 2</p>	
<p>Session 5  Sept. 29</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Media ethics and advertisement</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Advertising is not ethics free; Why ethics in advertising is needed?</p>	

	<p>Revenue at all costs ends with no revenue. Misleading consumers is short-term strategy. Safeguarding consumers. Ethics in marketing means applying standards of fairness, or moral rights and wrongs, to marketing decision-making. Is marketing ethical, unethical or neutral? It is not about the “product”, it is about the audience. Principles of advertising and relations to the audience. Transparency as a media ethics tool. False advertising. What does “social acceptance” mean in communication and in advertising? Deceptive advertising or mock-ups in advertising. Review for the midterm</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Advertising Ethics – Principles and Tips  <a href="https://www.marketing91.com/advertising-ethics/">https://www.marketing91.com/advertising-ethics/</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma, No. 3 (example related to marketing)</p>	
<p>Session 6 Oct. 6</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Ethics in communication and Public Relations</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Truth as a key principle. Does the truth work regarding communication and marketing? Public relations and communicating truth. Difference between marketing and advertising. Ethical communication means personal and professional ethics. Content is vitally important, as it is the message. Face to face vs. electronic communication. Understanding the audience, art of being persuasive. What is the news in PR? Making the story a PR tool as well. Can social media replace traditional media? PR tools. Role of media ombudsman; Denial is needed. What does transparency mean in advertising and communication means? Trust – easy to lose, difficult to gain. Emotions in communication. Failures in communication.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Six Signs of Poor Communication Skills  <a href="https://kandidataasia.com/6-signs-of-poor-communication-skills-and-how-to-improve-them/">https://kandidataasia.com/6-signs-of-poor-communication-skills-and-how-to-improve-them/</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 4 (example related to PR)</p>	
<p>Session 7 Oct. 13</p>	<p><b>Topic:</b> Use and misuse of emotions</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Public relations: advocate or adversary? Use of hidden cameras. Ethics in documentary making and video production. Impact of reporting, communication, marketing. Role of social media in political advertising and communication. Full disclosure or hiding in communication. What is copyright? Copying articles from other media to avoid conflicts with own ethical code. Humor and ethics. Overplaying emotions; Conflict between driving for maximum attention with fear of crossing the legal and ethical lines.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Journalism and Power of Emotions – Columbia Journalism Review  <a href="https://www.cjr.org/analysis/journalism_and_the_power_of_emotions.php">https://www.cjr.org/analysis/journalism_and_the_power_of_emotions.php</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 5</p>	

Session 8 Oct. 20	<p><b>Topic:</b> Review for the midterm</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The class will go through the main points of the course so far.</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Mid-term quiz in class</p>	
Oct. 27	<b>Midterm</b>	
Session 9 Nov. 3	<p><b>Topic:</b> Media to plead allegiance</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Journalist's loyalties: torn between competing allegiances. It is not ethical to close your eyes, silence is a crime. "National interest" and ethics. Communicating with audience. Ethics in war journalism. There is no conflict without media. Dehumanization of the enemy ends in humanization of your own audience. Reporting and audience unification. Reporting about terrorism. Reporting suicide. When is a reporter allowed to be biased? Role of "postman"; Recognizing "royal plural". Is it ethical to take upon a role in forcing peace?</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Social Media – a Tool for Dehumanization <a href="https://master-iesc-angers.com/social-media-a-tool-of-dehumanization/">https://master-iesc-angers.com/social-media-a-tool-of-dehumanization/</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 6</p>	
Session 10 Nov. 10	<p><b>Topic:</b> Populism and advocacy Vs. Journalism and objectivity</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Choosing the right story and not staying on the surface. Laziness as the enemy to media. Investigative journalism: challenges and benefits; Populism and journalism. Difference between advocacy and (objective) reporting - can you do both? Journalism's wrenching debate: in the Age of Trump, Boris Johnson, Victor Orban, and others is pure objectivity either possible or desirable? Do journalists have a greater duty beyond objectivity? Being more than a reporter. Can there be a democracy without ethical, factual journalists?</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Re-thinking objectivity – Columbia Journalism Review <a href="https://archives.cjr.org/feature/rethinking_objectivity.php">https://archives.cjr.org/feature/rethinking_objectivity.php</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 7</p>	
Nov. 17	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
Session 11 Nov. 24	<p><b>Topic:</b> Revenue is not journalism driving force</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The budget does (not) define the story. Ownership interest vs. public interest. Between ethics and revenue. How governments use economics to control media? Ethics as the journalists' tool vs. pressure from authorities. Can ethical journalism be profitable and what happens when it isn't? The new, non-profit media model. Are we losing the battle?</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Big Brother: Serbia's Media Are Creating Nation of China Lovers <a href="https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/26/big-brother-serbias-media-are-creating-nation-of-china-lovers/">https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/26/big-brother-serbias-media-are-creating-nation-of-china-lovers/</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 8</p>	

Session 12 Dec. 1	<p><b>Topic:</b> Is audience king?</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Getting to know your audience. Data and misuse of data. Privacy as a principle. How much is too much information. Protecting your source. Trap in using “reliable” source. Can correcting the use of privacy lead to harming the audience? Audience as an ally. Challenges of citizen journalism. Art of leaking. Headlines moved from fact to teasing. Trust, unless proven, does not last forever.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Power to the People: The Rise and Rise of Citizen Journalism  <a href="https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/photojournalism/power-people">https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/photojournalism/power-people</a></p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 9</p>	
Session 13 Dec. 8	<p><b>Topic:</b> Breaking or building stereotypes</p> <p><b>Description:</b> If you are ethical in 90% of cases, the remaining 10% is most important. Journalist ethics cannot be practiced partly or in part. Breaking vs. building stereotypes. Plagiarism, fabrication, and conflict of interests. Can you just lift anything seeing on the internet without paying for it? Is that any different from plagiarism?</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Quiz in class</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> (for the next class) Media Ethics dilemma No. 10</p>	
Session 14 Dec. 10 FRIDAY MAKE UP CLASS	<p><b>Topic:</b> Class review</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Back to basics; Reviewing the course; Going through each key</p> <p><b>Assignments:</b> Final exam quiz (in class)</p>	

### 5. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance	15	10%		
Class participation	15	15%	Ability to discuss outlined tricky situations in a way that displays understanding of the key issues	1,2
Presentation	30	20%	Display knowledge of situations in the media analyzed in class. Identify key characteristics and issues related to media ethics	1,2,3
Midterm essay	40	25%	Demonstrating the capacity to analyze a chosen topic from all needed angles	1,2,3
Final exam	50	30%	Displaying knowledge of basic media ethics guideline, as well as the capacity to compare	1,2,3

			different journalistic experience in following media ethic guidelines	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>		

\*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

## 6. Detailed description of the assignments

### Assignment 1:

#### Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
READING: Student is to test their reading comprehension and prepare for classroom discussion. The purpose is encouraging critical thinking on various media ethics issues and demonstrate communication skills	15%
QUIZ/QUESTIONNAIRE: The quiz will be graded on completion only, not correctness. The questions will be related to the content already addressed in the class.	10%

### Assignment 2:

#### Assessment breakdown – Midterm

Assessed area	Percentage
A) Media ethics dilemma – the purpose is to come up with the solution and justification of chosen solution. Critical thinking is crucial in this assignment	20%
B) Quiz: The questions will be related to the content already addressed in the class	10%
C) Content analysis: The students will be given content to make analysis from media ethics point of view. They need to explain why their approach is ethical and what responsible action should be taken	10%

### Assignment 3:

#### Assessment breakdown – Final exam

Assessed area	Percentage
A) Quiz: The questions will be related to the content already addressed in the course	10%
B) Essay: The students will be given a topic to study. The topic will not be related to one country but is applicable to many of them. The student will be free to choose countries from the provided list. They need to demonstrate knowledge about media ethics, practice critical thinking and justify responsible action that need to take place	25%



## **7. General Requirements and School Policies**

### ***General requirements***

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

### ***Electronic communication and submission***

The university and instructors shall only use students' university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams. Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, "COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question". All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

### ***Attendance***

Attendance, i.e., presence in class in real-time, is expected and encouraged. However, the requirement that students miss not more than 35% of real-time classes is temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Absence excuse and make-up options***

Should a student be absent from classes for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), and the student wishes to request that the absence be excused, the student should submit an Absence Excuse Request Form supplemented with documents providing reasons for the absence to the Dean of Students within one week of the absence. If possible, it is recommended the instructor be informed of the absence in advance. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if s/he submits an Absence Excuse Request Form along with the finalized add/drop form.

Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean of Students are entitled to make up assignments and exams provided their nature allows. Assignments missed due to unexcused absences which cannot be made up, may result in a decreased or failing grade as specified in the syllabus.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week of the date the absence was excused to arrange for make-up options.

***Late work:*** No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

### ***Electronic devices***

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). Any other use will result in the student being marked absent and/or being expelled from the class. No electronic devices may be used during tests or exams unless required by the exam format and the instructor.

***Eating*** is not allowed during classes.

### ***Cheating and disruptive behavior***

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the student's Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the student will fail the exam or assignment and be expelled from the exam or class.

### ***Plagiarism and Academic Tutoring Center***

Plagiarism is “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Random House, New York, 1993)

Turnitin’s White Paper ‘The Plagiarism Spectrum’ (available at <http://go.turnitin.com/paper/plagiarism-spectrum>) identifies 10 types of plagiarism ordered from most to least severe:

1. CLONE: An act of submitting another’s work, word-for-word, as one’s own.
2. CTRL-C: A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.
3. FIND-REPLACE: The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. REMIX: An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. RECYCLE: The act of borrowing generously from one’s own previous work without citation; To self-plagiarize.
6. HYBRID: The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. MASHUP: A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 ERROR: A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources
9. AGGREGATOR: The “Aggregator” includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.
10. RE-TWEET: This paper includes proper citation but relies too closely on the text’s original wording and/or structure.

At minimum, plagiarism from types 1 through 8 will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the student’s Dean. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Allegations of bought papers and intentional or consistent plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

If unsure about technical aspects of writing, and to improve their academic writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/scheduler/manage/event/1/>.

### ***Course accessibility and inclusion***

Students with disabilities should contact the Dean of Students to discuss reasonable accommodations. Academic accommodations are not retroactive.

Students who will be absent from course activities due to religious holidays may seek reasonable accommodations by contacting the Dean of Students in writing within the first two weeks of the term. All requests must include specific dates for which the student requests accommodations.

## 8. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95-100	<b>Excellent performance.</b> The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A-	90-94	
B+	87-89	<b>Good performance.</b> The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	<b>Fair performance.</b> The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	65-69	<b>Poor.</b> The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60-64	
F	0-59	<b>Fail.</b> The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

\* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Nenad Pejic  
Date: June 28, 2021

Approved by: Tony Ozuna  
Date: July 7, 2021