

Journalistic Judgment – G54.0012.01 (SHERP) Summer, 2010

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Tuesdays and Thursdays
6:00 to 9:00, Room 657
20 Cooper Square
May 18 to June 24, 2009

OVERVIEW

This course is not about the abstract ethical postulates you could find in a philosophy textbook. It is about ethics in action: the judgments journalists make as we practice our craft, and the ethical dimensions of the scientific, medical and environmental issues we cover. There is a lot to talk about, and we will. There is not a lot of time, so we'll make the most of what we have. We'll start with the basics: media law (libel, freedom of information, access) and core journalism values (transparency, fairness). We'll pin down the shibboleths of 'balance' and 'objectivity' before moving on to more subtle issues of framing and bias. We'll talk about peer review, disclosure and fraud in science – and in journalism, too. And because it is easy to talk about these issues abstractly (you already know not to lie, mislead or steal someone else's work) we will spend most of our time discussing real-world case studies that involve more subtle clashes of journalistic and/or scientific values. We will also critique the ethics of two or three stories (or videos or radio pieces) every day. If all goes well, by the time we are finished you will be thinking about, and perhaps even second-guessing, decisions you make every day as a journalist. Introspection and self-criticality (without paralysis) are hallmark characteristics of the very best journalists. Arrogance is a hallmark of the worst.

In addition, since we are in an era of tremendous tumult and occasional creativity in the news business, we will look at some of the ethical issues raised by old and new forms of covering the news from the old business model (advertising-funded news organizations) to newer forms, such as professional-amateur collaborations and grant-funded or advocacy-inspired news organizations.

READINGS AND DISCUSSION

We will not have formal lectures in this class. Instead, we'll spend our time discussing issues found in several case studies. For that reason, it will be crucial for everyone to do ALL the reading for every class, and to be prepared to speak knowledgeably about it. Class participation (in various forms) will constitute a third of your grade in this class. I expect you to show up prepared and ready to contribute to class discussion and I expect you to show up for all twelve classes. If you are not going to be in class or are going to be late, let me know ahead of time—either in person or by e-mail.

I also expect you to identify current news stories that we can discuss in class for the ethical issues they bring up. Use a quick headline, with a shortened url and the hashtag #jj0012 on Twitter to point these links out to me and your fellow students. I am

not looking for quantity on Twitter but quality. At minimum, however, you should post one Tweet the day before class.

ASSIGNMENTS

There will be just two writing assignments. You should post your work as a Word file (.doc NOT .docx) in the appropriate folder at <http://journalismjudgmentnyu.pbworks.com/>

Assignments are due at the start of class on the due date. I expect you to meet all deadlines and to let me know ahead of time if you cannot. Even the best excuse will not be good enough to avoid a lowered grade for missing a deadline.

Writing Assignment Number 1: Story – Produce an 800-1200 word story about an ethical dilemma in science. Find a topic in which there is a news peg and multiple, clashing perspectives. This should be a reported story, not a commentary or essay. All topics must be cleared with me; I don't want two people writing about the same thing.

TWO pitches (150 words each) due May 25. Story due June 10. Rewrite due June 24.

Writing Assignment Number 2: Critique – Find a piece of journalism on a science, health or environmental topic that you believe violates good journalistic practices (unfairness, bias, poor news judgment, opacity, phony balance, lack of context, etc.). Write a 500-700 word critique explaining why, and what you would do differently to improve the piece.

These critiques are different from the ones that you have already done in Dan Fagin's environmental class because they must focus on ethical flaws—not just factual or conceptual flaws.

These will be assigned on a rotating basis, with one or two due each class. When it's your turn, you will also lead the class in a five-minute discussion in addition to turning in your critique.

Make sure to choose a news story or feature (not an opinion piece) that is between 500 and 2,000 words long (long enough to be fairly critiqued, short enough that we can read it in five minutes). If you'd rather critique a video or audio piece, make sure it's between two and ten minutes long. Either way, pick a story that is for a general audience and is by a professional journalist.

If you choose a print piece, make 15 paper copies and bring them to class. If you choose an audio or video piece, make sure it is easily accessible and send a link to everyone in class. We will read/watch/listen to the piece before you do your critique.

GRADING

In-class discussion: 30 percent
Twitter participation: 10 percent
Story: 20 percent
Story Rewrite: 20 percent
Critique: 15 percent
Oral presentation: 5 percent

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

May 18 — Introduction; SPJ code of ethics; sign up for critiques
May 20 — Fairness and objectivity
May 25 — Media Law: Guest speaker media attorney Carolyn Foley
May 27 — Transparency and Conflicts of Interest
June 1 — News Judgment
June 3 — Advocacy and bias: Guest speaker: Writer Michael Lemonick,
writer at Climate Central
June 8 — Covering controversy, going beyond he said, she said.
Guest: Sheri Fink, ProPublica
June 10 — Role of music; choice of photos; preserving the press's watchdog function
Guest: Cynthia Joyce, MSNBC
June 15 — Source transparency in science, medicine and environmental stories
Guest speaker: Paul Raeburn
June 17 — Business ethics: How do you get your reporting trip funded?
June 22 — Collapsing roles in new media: when the reporter is also the
publisher and may be partisan, too
June 24 — Wrap—up

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

For May 18 – Read Lukoil plagiarism story.
For May 20 – Use First Amendment Handbook to answer questions
from media law exercise using First Amendment handbook as
reference; Read FOIA articles from Times-Picayune, AHCI
Have specific questions for Carolyn Foley
For May 25 – Read stories on melamine scandals, Turn in two 150-word story
pitches
For May 27 – Read stories on Fred Goodwin, Sanjay Gupta and speakers' fees
Read student critiques 1 and 2
For June 1 – Read angiogenesis stories, read critiques 3 and 4
For June 3 – Read advocacy stories, read critiques 5 and 6
For June 8 – Read Sheri Fink's New Orleans story read critiques 7, 8 and 9
For June 10 – Turn in 800-1200 word story;
Read lollipop and Nachtwey stories; view “infamous photo fakes”

- Read Paul Starr and Yochai Benkler in The New Republic.
- For June 15 – Read Paul Raeburn’s piece in Business Week on hospital sponsorships, read NJ hospital advertising flap, read critiques 10 and 11
- For June 17 – Read Slate piece on non-profits and articles about garbage sea
Read critiques 12 and 13
- For June 22 – Read Off the Bus story in CJR. Read Ethical journalists guide to selling advertising (three parts)
- For June 24 – Turn in story rewrite; reading remaining critiques, if any

READING LIST

For May 18

Plagiarism is not just cut-and-paste

Lukoil story

<http://www.observer.com/2009/media/fortunes-barney-gimbel-leaves-magazine-amid-plagiarism-charge>

For May 20

Introduction to Ethics, Media Law and the Freedom of Information Act

<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

<http://ethicsadviceforjournalists.org/>

First Amendment Handbook:

<http://www.rcfp.org/handbook/index.html>

Freedom of Information Act

Association of Healthcare Journalists: “FOIA survey: FDA's slow response means stories go unpublished,” Fall 2007

<http://www.healthjournalism.org/about-news-detail.php?id=50>

ACHJ: “FOIA & the FDA: Interviews with journalists,” Fall 2007

<http://www.healthjournalism.org/secondarypage-details.php?id=222>

For May 25: Melamine scandals
FOIA, pesticides and foreigners, oh my!

Associated Press: "FDA finds traces of melamine in US infant formula," By Martha Mendoza and Justin Pritchard, 11/26/2008
http://www.ap.org/FOI/foi_112608b.htm

Washington Post: "FDA Draws Fire Over Chemicals In Baby Formula," By Lyndsey Layton, 11/27/2008
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/26/AR2008112600386.html>

AP: FDA finds melamine, byproduct in more formula, By Martha Mendoza 01/7/2009:
http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/395180_melamine08.html

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122764783105057435.html>

NYTIMES Op-Ed: Our Homegrown Melamine Problem
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/17/opinion/17mcwilliams.html?scp=6&sq=melamine&st=cse>

For May 27
Transparency, press releases and conflicts of interest

Infinite Mind host: Dr. Fred Goodwin
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/22/health/22radio.html?_r=1&hp

CJR: Sanjay Gupta and speaking engagements
http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/the_tv_doc_as_surgeon_general.php

Physician-journalists and Haiti
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/19/AR2010011904293.html>
<http://www.onthedia.org/transcripts/2010/01/22/01>

PLOS: How much of medical literature is ghost-written by pharmaceutical industry?
<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.0040286>

Annals of Internal Medicine: Press Releases by Academic Medical Centers: Not So Academic?
<http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/150/9/613>

For June 1

Angiogenesis and news judgment; the pressure to hype

New York Times: “Hope in the Lab: A Cautious Awe Greets Drugs That Eradicate Tumors in Mice” by Gina Kolata 05/03/1998

<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/03/us/hope-lab-special-report-cautious-awe-greets-drugs-that-eradicate-tumors-mice.html>

TIME: “The Hope and the Hype” by 05/18/1998

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,988347,00.html>

New York Times: “Tests on Mice Block a Defense by Cancer” by Nicholas Wade 11/27/1997

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/27/us/tests-on-mice-block-a-defense-by-cancer.html>

Los Angeles Times: “A Case Study in How a Story can Set off a Frenzy,” by David Shaw 02/13/2000

<http://articles.latimes.com/2000/feb/13/news/mn-64006>

For June 3

New opportunities for managing conflict of interest: Advocacy and philanthropy

NYT: Gates funding of global health stories

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/09/health/09glob.html?_r=1&ref=business

Global Health Report: New Gates Grants for Global Health News

<http://globalhealthreport.blogspot.com/2008/12/new-gates-grant-for-global-health-news.html>

Grist: Top environment reporters talk about journalism vs. activism

<http://www.grist.org/comments/soapbox/2006/08/24/reporters/>

Columbia Journalism Review: “A One-Stop Shop for Climate Information?” by Curtis Brainerd 12.08.2008 (including video) [Climate Central]

http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/climate_central.php

For June 8

Covering controversy, going beyond he said, she said

Sheri Fink’s piece in NYTimes

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/30/magazine/30doctors.html>

For June 10

Making choices about sound and images; preserving the watchdog function of the press
How to get kids to cry on camera: snatch their lollipop.

<http://onthemedia.org/transcripts/2008/11/28/05>

For June 10 (continued)

James Nachtwey photo essay on global health for TIME

http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/james_nachtwey_global/

Infamous photo fakes

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/photo/chi-080710-photo-fakes-photogallery,0,4231467.photogallery> (all 15 slides)

The New Republic “Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers” by Paul Starr 03/04/2009

<http://www.tnr.com/article/goodbye-the-age-newspapers-hello-new-era-corruption>

The New Republic “A New Era of Corruption?” by Yochai Benkler 03/04/2009

<http://www.tnr.com/article/correspondence-new-era-corruption>

For June 15

Paul Raeburn’s piece in Business Week

on hospital sponsorship of local television news

<http://www.businessweek.com/archives/2000/b3670143.arc.htm>

Hospital pulls ads after critical newspaper piece

<http://www.healthjournalism.org/blog/2009/05/hospital-cancels-ads-bans-paper-after-story/>

For June 17

Business ethics

Slate: “Nonprofit Journalism Comes at a Cost” by Jack Shafer

<http://www.slate.com/id/2231009/>

Afloat in the Ocean, Expanding Islands of Trash

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/10/science/10patch.html>

<http://blog.spot.us/2009/11/10/the-pacific-garbage-patch-published/>

http://www.cjr.org/the_news_frontier/trash_compactor.php?page=all

For June 22

Collapsing roles in new media: new business models, renewed ethical questions

CJR: “Get Off the Bus” by Amanda Michel March/April 2009

http://www.cjr.org/feature/get_off_the_bus.php

Ethical journalist’s guide to selling advertising

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/robert/200901/1635/>

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/robert/200902/1642/>

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/robert/200902/1646/>

For June 25

You have your hands full with the story rewrite, focus on that and read any remaining student critiques

Resources that are good to know about:

FOIA

Associated Press resources for filing a Freedom of Information request

<http://www.ap.org/FOI/resources.html>

Ethics

NYU Journalism Ethics Handbook

<http://journalism.nyu.edu/ethics/handbook/>