

# media ethics & social responsibility

MC 4090

SUMMER  
2013

MTWThF  
11 - 12:30

Hodges 236

Instructor:  
Chance York



Jonah Lehrer was a popular journalist and author until a 2012 self-plagiarism scandal. His case raises the question: Why is it wrong to recycle old material?

## Course Description, Objectives, and Learning Outcomes

This course explores ethical issues in gathering, processing and disseminating media content.

Media professionals are often faced with difficult decisions in which more than one choice may seem appropriate. The goal of this course is not to teach students what a "right" or "wrong" decision is, but to teach how to think about right and wrong, and make better decisions.

There are two primary course objectives: (1) to examine selected contemporary ethical topics related to mass media, and (2) to provide an

opportunity for students to develop their critical thinking about those topics.

In this course, we will explore the origin and application of basic ethical theories, such as Aristotle's *Golden Mean* and Sissela Bok's *Test of Publicity*. We will analyze and discuss real world cases involving media practitioners who faced ethical dilemmas. And we will examine more abstract ethical topics related to mass media, like the erosion of privacy in the age of social media and "big data."

Students who take this course will be able to apply broad theories of moral reasoning, like Aristotle's *Golden Mean*, to contemporary professional problems.

Students will be able to identify professional and ethical standards, such as honesty and confidentiality, that guide decision-making. Students will also develop ethical problem-solving skills and cultivate a tolerance for disagreement.

### what's in the syllabus:

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### course details

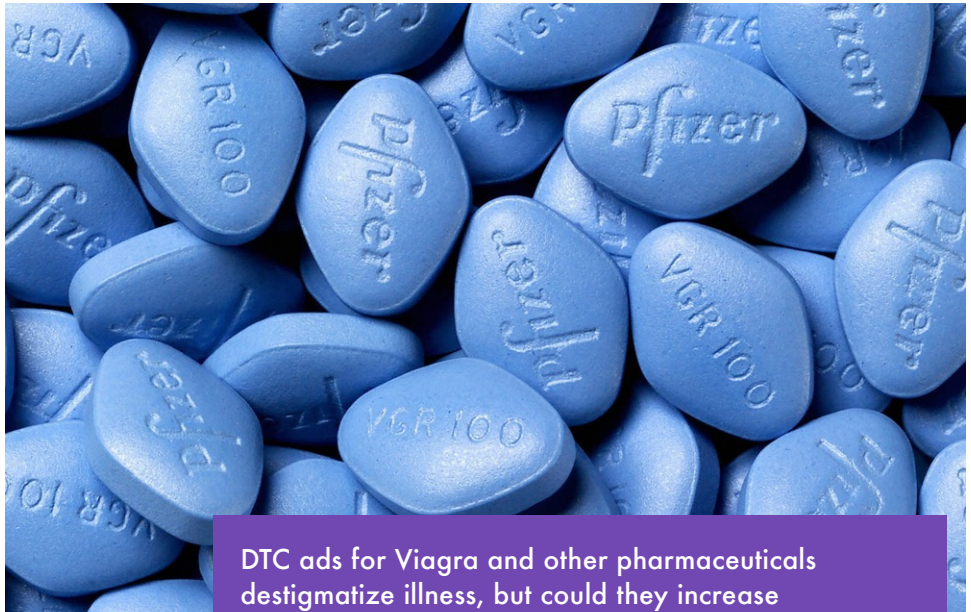
Website: Supplemental readings and course grades posted on LSU Moodle website.

Required Textbook:

Peck, L.A., & Reel, G.S. (2013). *Media Ethics at Work: True Stories From Young Professionals* (1st ed.). New York: CQ Press.

## the give-and-take of class discussion

How do you meaningfully contribute to class discussion? First, actively listen. Listen to what others say before formulating a response. Understand you may disagree with their opinion, but that their opinion may nonetheless have merit. Respond politely and don't be afraid to ask questions.



DTC ads for Viagra and other pharmaceuticals destigmatize illness, but could they increase unnecessary prescriptions based on consumer demand?

## Course Requirements

This course involves reading, writing, and in-class discussion. Students are expected to read before each class period, think critically about the material, bring their book to class, and engage in lively, substantive, and respectful discussion of the material with fellow students. The major components of the course are:

### Attendance & Participation

I will assess attendance at the beginning of each class period. Participation will be an overall assessment of how often and meaningfully a student participates in class discussion (see "Guide to Class Participation" on course Moodle page). Students who regularly and vigorously contribute to discussion based on facts, ideas and arguments taken from the course materials will earn higher participation grades than students who rarely talk or who rely solely on personal anecdote. Participation grades will be provided at mid term and before the final exam.

### Quizzes

Twelve, 10-question quizzes based on reading materials will be given during the semester. Of the 12, your highest 10 will count toward your final grade. The quiz questions are meant to point you toward important ideas that will be addressed on the midterm and final exams.

### Case Study Presentation

Each of our regular class periods will address an ethical topic in mass media (see course schedule). We will generally have 1-2 brief readings on each topic. Additionally, each class period a student will research

and present to the class a unique case study related to the day's topic. For example, if the class topic is plagiarism, the student should find a reputable news story, journal article, book chapter, etc. that addresses a case in which a media professional plagiarized. Presentations will be 10-15 minutes and may be oral-only or visual (e.g., Powerpoint). Presentations will outline the details of the case, and briefly analyze the ethical dimensions of the case and its stakeholders. Students will then ask the class several critical thinking questions designed to spark discussion. Students will sign up for a case study presentation date on the second class period (Tuesday June 11, 2013).

### Ethics Memos

Media professionals are often faced with difficult decisions that they must justify to others. For instance, how do you justify a decision to fire an employee who's engaged in questionable behavior? How do you justify telling the truth if it will cause others harm? Memos give students an opportunity to practice writing formal, *moral* justifications for tough professional decisions. Each student will be expected to produce three 2-page memos that analyze and defend a particular course of action in a case study from the previous week's readings. Memos will be due at the beginning of each Monday class (June 17; July 1, 8).

### Midterm & Final Exams

There will be an in-class multiple choice / fill in the blank / short answer midterm exam (Monday, June 24) and final exam (Friday, July 12). The final is cumulative. Both exams will cover course readings, class discussion and related course materials like in-class handouts.

<p><b>online resources</b></p> <p>There are several ethics websites that are very useful for professionals – young and old.</p> <p>These sites list professional codes of conduct and other useful ethical guidelines.</p>	<p><b>journalism</b></p> <p>Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp">www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp</a></p> <p>Radio TV Digital News Association Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics">www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics</a></p>	<p><b>pr / political communication</b></p> <p>PRSA Member Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/CodeEnglish">www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/CodeEnglish</a></p> <p>Amer. Assoc. of Political Consultants Code of Ethics <a href="http://www.theaacpc.org/default.asp?contentID=701">www.theaacpc.org/default.asp?contentID=701</a></p>	<p><b>advertising</b></p> <p>Amer. Advert. Fed. Code <a href="http://www.aaf.org/images/public/aaf_content/images/ad%20ethics/IAE_Principles_Practices.pdf">http://www.aaf.org/images/public/aaf_content/images/ad%20ethics/IAE_Principles_Practices.pdf</a></p> <p>Amer. Market. Assoc. Code <a href="http://www.marketingpower.com/aboutama/pages/statement%20of%20ethics.aspx">www.marketingpower.com/aboutama/pages/statement%20of%20ethics.aspx</a></p>
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**Course Policies**

**Readings**

Students are expected to read all assigned texts before each class period. This includes all readings posted on the course Moodle page.

**Assignments & Grading**

Attendance	50 pts.
Participation	50 pts.
Quizzes	100 pts.
Case Study Presentation	50 pts.
Memos (3)	75 pts.
Midterm Exam	100 pts.
Final Exam	100 pts.
<b>Total =</b>	<b>525 pts.</b>

**Grading Scale**

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69%, F = 59% or below

There are no exceptions to this scale. A student with a grade of 89.4% receives a B, while a student with an 89.5% is rounded up to an A.

**Cell Phones & Laptops**

All cell phones should be turned off or put on silent before class begins. Checking your phone during class is not permitted. Because the class is a discussion-based seminar, I discourage - but ultimately allow - laptops. If you use a laptop, you must be respectful to others and not distract from class discussion.

**Make-Up Exams**

No make-up exams will be given except in cases of documented illnesses, emergencies, or university approved functions. Documentation of these cases must be provided. You should inform your professor of any problems before the exam.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is not tolerated, regardless of whether it is self-plagiarism or plagiarism of others' work. All student work should be original and entirely their own. Any student who engages in any form of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students.

**Disabilities**

If you have a disability which may require accommodation, you must contact the Office of Disability Services to document the disability and receive accommodation. For more information, visit their website at <http://disability.lsu.edu> or call 225-578-5919.

**Questions**

I take questions regarding the course at the end of each class period, during my office hours, by phone, and via email. Please allow a reasonable amount of time for an email response. Call my phone if it's an emergency. Don't text.



Wikileaks founder Julian Assange publishes U.S. military secrets online. His actions are in the public's interest, but do they jeopardize national security?

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Summer Office Hours:  
Fri 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.  
or by appointment

# Course Schedule

Date	Topic / Presenter / Readings
June 10	Course Introduction
June 11	<p>Nature, Nurture and Morality: Where Does Human Morality Come From?</p> <p>Lecture: The Origins of Morality</p> <p>Read: Ohlson, "The Good, The Bad, and The Brain"</p> <p>Assignment Due: Write Down Top Four Presentation Topics</p> <p>Presenter: <u>N/A</u></p>
June 12	<p>The Ethics of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle</p> <p>Lecture: Codifying Moral Reasoning into Ethical Theory in Ancient Greece</p> <p>Read: Peck &amp; Reel, Ch. 1 (p. 5-11)</p> <p>Presenter: <u>N/A</u></p>
June 13	<p>Being Sensitive To News Sources: Deciding What's Fit to Print</p> <p>Read: Peck &amp; Reel, Ch. 16, Peck &amp; Reel (p. 115 on SPJ Code of Ethics)</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
June 14	<p>Manufacturing News: The Ethics of Constructing Reality Pt. 1</p> <p>Lecture: Agenda-Setting Theory</p> <p>Read: Peck &amp; Reel, Ch. 6</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
June 17	<p>Manufacturing News: The Ethics of Constructing Reality Pt. 2</p> <p>Lecture: Kant</p> <p>Read: Peck &amp; Reel, Ch. 3; Peck &amp; Reel (p. 12-13)</p> <p>Assignment Due: Ethics Memo I</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>

Date	Topic / Presenter / Readings
June 18	Rumors and Deadlines: Being Sensitive or Comprising the Bottom Line Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 17  Presenter: _____
June 19	"Astroturfing": The Ethics of Fake Promotions Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 5  Presenter: _____
June 20	Truth in Public Relations: Problems with Accuracy & Omission Pt. I Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 11  Presenter: _____
June 21	Conflicts of Interest: Individual Ethics vs. The Client's vs. The Firm's Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 4  Presenter: _____
June 24	MIDTERM EXAM Review: Reading Notes, Lecture Notes, Discussion Notes, Quizzes, Handouts
June 25	Promoting Candidates: Ethical Issues Surrounding Political Campaigning Lecture: Bentham's & Mill's Utilitarianism Read: Peck & Reel (p. 13-16); Maisel, "Candidates: Promises and Persuasion" Assignment Due: Ethics Memo II  Presenter: _____

Date	Topic / Presenter / Readings
June 26	<p>How Far Is Too Far?: Hate Speech in Mass Media &amp; Politics  Read: Simmons, "Hate Radio: The Outer Limits of Tasteful Broadcasting" (p. 279-281);  Sebastian, "Did The Onion Tarnish its Brand with C-word Tweet?"</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
June 27	<p>Sex Scandals, Tabloids and The Not-So-Private Lives of Politicians and Celebrities  Lecture: The Morality of Privacy  Read: Wilkins, "Do Celebrities Have Privacy?" (p. 278-279)</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
June 28	<p>Microtargeting: Getting (Very) Personal with Campaign Promotions  Read: Barocas, "The Price of Precision" (p. 31-36)</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
July 1	<p>Guerrilla Marketing: Stealth Approaches to Promoting Products  Lecture: John Rawls &amp; W.D. Ross  Read: Peck &amp; Reel (p. 16-18); Osterhout, "Stealth Marketing: When You're Being Pitched  And You Don't Even Know It!"; Patterson &amp; Wilkins, Ch. "Strategic Communication"</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
July 2	<p>Thin Images, Depressed Audiences: The Effects of Body Images in Media  Read: Strauss, "Please, Do Feed the Models: The Effect of Super-Thin Models in Advertising  on Women"; Neff, "Study: Skinny Women Better for Bottom Line"</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>
July 3	<p>Sex, Romance and Expectations: Dealing With Professional-Source Relationships  Read: Peck &amp; Reel, Ch. 24</p> <p>Presenter: _____</p>

Date	Topic / Presenter / Readings
July 4	INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY NO CLASS
July 5	INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY NO CLASS
July 8	How Graphic is Too Graphic?: Death, Violence and Gore in Media Photography Lecture: Sissela Bok Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 16; Peck & Reel, (p. 18-19); Smith, "The Montana Meth Project" Assignment Due: Ethics Memo III  Presenter: _____
July 9	Special Topic – Plagiarism and Self-Plagiarism: What Happens When You Catch It? Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 8  Presenter: _____
July 10	Special Topic – When Truth Collides with Safety: Mass Media and National Security Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 10; Wilkins, "WikiLeaks" (p. 146-148)  Presenter: _____
July 11	Special Topic – Getting a Job and Keeping It: The Ethics of Job Hunting Read: Peck & Reel, Ch. 25; Hill, "Facebook Can Tell You If a Person is Worth Hiring"  Presenter: _____
July 12	FINAL EXAM Review: Reading Notes, Lecture Notes, Discussion Notes, Quizzes, Handouts