JOURNALISM 501

The Social Responsibility of Journalism
Bruce J. Evensen

Winter 2015
Monday, 5:45-9:00 pm

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, 4:45-5:30
Daley Building, Room 1125
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Course Design and History:

When we were developing an MA in Journalism that would emphasize the ethical obligations of writers, reporters, producers and editors working in journalism’s new online landscape, we decided a core course for such a curriculum would be a class focusing on the social responsibility of journalists to give citizens news they need to know that makes democracy and self-governance possible. Convergence has created new opportunities for journalists to gather and present information, while posing new challenges to the values that undergird the profession. Journalism is the only profession in American life that has the Constitutional protection that government “shall make no law abridging” its freedom. This freedom has its obligations. It is rooted in the Enlightenment certainty that citizens can be trusted to make the right decisions when they have the necessary information. The role of the press is to not only to make money for shareholders, but public service.

Course Purpose:

This course will explore the current and historic role journalists have played in meeting their social responsibility to the American and world community. That responsibility, through the public journalism movement of the late 20th century and the use of social media in the early 21st century, has been to not only report facts, but the truth behind facts that give them meaning. Journalists, however, have not always lived up to their responsibility. No profession has fallen further faster in public estimation than journalism. Yet, Americans continue to rely on journalists in unprecedented numbers to give them a picture of the world which becomes the basis of personal and collective action. We now daily connect to the information grid. It is how we do life and create community. Journalists as content providers and producers are the architects of that grid. Students will finish this course with a better understanding of how to be good architects, who help create and maintain an informed civil society.
Course Readings:

Readings for this course are on electronic reserve through DePaul University’s library webpage. There is no textbook for this course. Students should choose THREE of the readings for each week. Each of these readings will be equally helpful when students write their papers and final essays.

Method of Evaluation:

One-third of the final grade comes from five two-page papers on assigned readings. These papers are due when you present on them in class.

One-third of the final grade comes from three research papers of three pages apiece with each paper focusing on the arguments of three authors and three video clips we analyzed in class. The first paper is due by week four; the second by week seven; and the third by week 10.

One-third of the final grade comes from a take home final exam that will be given out on the last day of class and will be due one week later on Monday, March 16 at 6:30 pm. This is a firm deadline. No extensions will be granted under any circumstances.

Standard Policies:

This class conforms to university policy on plagiarism and sexual harassment. Students unaware of these policies should consult DePaul’s student handbook. Assignment deadlines will be strictly enforced. Extensions will not be given. Students who are to miss class for valid medical reasons must contact the professor before class.

Reading Schedule

Week One  Social Responsibility in the Digital Age

Week Two  The Social Responsibility of the Press:

   9/11 and the “War on Terror”


**Week Three  War Reporting**


**Week Four** The Press and the Political Process


**Week Five** Tabloid Journalism


**Week Six** Journalism and Reform


**Week Seven**  The Sports Section


**Week Eight** Political Scandal


**Week Nine** The News Online


**Week Ten** Our Digital Future


David Klein, “Good Newspapers Can Survive if They Break Their Old Culture,” Advertising Age, September 14, 2009.


Alan Murray, “Seven Reasons for Optimism about the News Business,” Wall Street Journal (March 26, 2014)

Take Home Final Exams are due Monday, March 16, 2015 by 6:30 p.m.

(This is a hard deadline. There are no extensions under any circumstances.)