Media Ethics
Ethics

‘Moral rules of conduct that guide one’s decisions.’
I believe that the **public journal is a public trust**; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking and **clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental** to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should **write only what he holds in his heart to be true**.

I believe that **suppression of the news**, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, **is indefensible**.
I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocketbook is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising, news and editorial columns should alike serve the best interests of readers; that a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service.
I believe that the journalism which succeeds best -- and best deserves success -- fears God and honors Man; is **stoutly independent**, unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-controlled, patient, always respectful of its readers but always unafraid, is quickly indignant at injustice; is unswayed by the appeal of privilege or the clamor of the mob; seeks to give every man a chance and, as far as law and honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so, an equal chance; is profoundly patriotic while sincerely **promoting international good will** and cementing world-comradeship; is a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world.
Code of Ethics

- Principles of good practice regarding how to address issues
  - Specified codes held by
    - Professional Associations
      - American Society of Newspaper Editors
      - Society of Professional Journalists
    - Media Organizations
      - Associated Press
      - Hearst Newspapers
    - Individual Publications
      - Orlando Sentinel
      - The Tampa Tribune
BUT...

**CHALLENGE:**

- Freedom of speech vs. ethical restraint

- Adherence to codes is a choice
  - Not every journalist is associated
  - Each journalist has a different set of accepted values

- Some argue strict codes of ethics make journalists easier targets for libel suits
What are your personal ethics?

There are three primary ethical philosophies.

Each answers this fundamental question:

Does the end justify the means?
NO
YES
MAYBE

How you answer the question indicates your ethical perspective…
Ethical Philosophies

- IF you answered **NO**…
  - You are an **ABSOLUTIST** and you subscribe to **deontological ethics**.

- IF you answered **YES**…
  - You are an **RELATIVIST** and you subscribe to **teleological ethics**.

- IF you answered **MAYBE**…
  - You subscribe to **situational ethics**.
Deontological

○ **ABSOLUTISM:** Ethics of duty

○ *End never justifies means.*
  - EXAMPLE: Stealing is wrong.
  - Duty to do what is right
    - Right vs. Wrong
    - Determined by fixed set of principles

○ Discover principles/rules & follow them
Categorical Imperative

- Developed by Immanuel Kant
  - 18th Century German Philosopher

- “…human knowledge rely upon a priori judgments”

- Act on maxim you wish to become universal law
  - Take action in ways you want to be universal
Absolutist Journalists

- Duty of the journalist is to report the news
- Main concern whether event is newsworthy
- High value on justice and what is right
  - How information is obtained is important
- Focused on message
  - *If journalists worried about possible consequences of reporting something they would never report anything*…attributed to Walter Cronkite
Teleological Ethics

- RELATIVISM: Ethics of final ends

- *End justifies means*
  - EXAMPLE: Someone stealing food for a hungry child performs a virtuous act.

- Consequences of act determine whether or not it is ethical
Pragmatism

- Popularized by John Dewey
  - 20th century educator and philosopher

- Human purposes are derived from wants and needs

- **Judge actions by their results**
  - Try to determine appropriate action by anticipating probable outcome
Relative Journalist

- Purpose of reporting:
  - To be a watch dog on government
  - Protect common good
  - Keep public informed

- Looks at motivations of persons involved

- Concealing identity to get info justified if it benefits others
Situational Ethics

- Ethics of specific acts

- **Whether end justifies means depends on situation.**
  - EXAMPLE: Stealing is justifiable in some circumstances.

- Moral principles are relative to situation
  - Break rules if situation requires it
Every situation is unique & assessed independently

No moral absolutes
DETERMINER: Deontelics

- Developed by John Merrill
  - Journalism scholar and ethicist
  - combined deontology & teleology

- To act responsibly
  - Some acts are by nature unethical & some may vary
  - Truth is paramount & lying unethical in most cases

- Principles may need to be violated for greater good
DETERMINER: Veils of Ignorance

- Developed by John Rawl
  - Political theorist

- Treat everyone the same
  - Ignore biases of race, gender, age, etc.
  - Purposefully conceal social or economic status when looking at people

- Journalists often are harsher with famous people or public officials
  - Using perspective may tame adversarial attitudes
DETERMINER: Golden Rule

- “Do unto others…”
  - Biblical/Religious Precept

- Love of Neighbor
  - Popularized by Joseph Fletcher
  - All principles are relative in relation to “Love your neighbor as yourself”
  - Set aside ethical principles if needed to “love” others

- Dilemma between value of individual vs. community at large
DETERMINER: Utilitarianism

- Popularized by John Stuart Mills
  - 19th Century British Philosopher & Political Economist (*On Liberty*)

- “Seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number…”
  - What will harm fewest or benefit most

- Variations
  - “…greatest good…”
  - “…over long periods of time.”
    - long term effects outweigh immediate
DETERMINER: Golden Mean

- Developed by Aristotle
  - 322 BC Greek Philosopher, student of Plato, head of *The School of Athens*

- Rationale moral position that avoids extremes
  - “…appropriate location between two extreme..”
  - moderate balance

- Journalistic practice of trying to showing tragedy without offending victims or those involved
Situational Journalist

- Values reflect how journalists would want to be treated

- Reporting practices determined by each situation and known information

- Do whatever is best for the public
  - If there was an exception, it should benefit the least advantaged.
ETHICAL CHALLENGES
Ethical Limits on Free Speech

- Legal stories may still be unethical
- Libel & Indecency
- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Confidentiality
Ethical Problems for Media

- **Sensationalism**
  - (Over)dramatizing issues
  - Focusing on most salacious points

- **Commercialism**
  - Media as a Business
    - Pressure for profits
    - News space vs. ad space
  - Focus on dramatic
    - Sacrifice news value for ratings

- **Press release journalism**
  - Let PR dictate stories
Conflict of Interest

- **Freebies**
  - Accepting gifts from sources…gifts with a price
  - Junkets: free trips/travel with expectation reporters will write on experience
  - Society of Professional Journalists policy
    - Nothing of value shall be accepted
    - ?? Who determines what is value??

- **Payola**
  - Accepting “outside” pay from a source
  - Doing promotional work for “sources”
  - Mercury News ( , CA) prohibits reporters from owning stock in local companies
  - ?? Can you cover a story you have investment in??
Checkbook Journalism
- Paying a source for an interview
- Tabloid journalism feeds this practice
- Should you tell audience?

Friendship
- Covering story where sources are friends
- Reporting or not reporting news because of relationship influence
- Getting a story lead from a friend?
Participation in the News

- Covering stories you have “association” with
- **Challenge**: uninvolved can result in uninformed
- Disclosure of memberships, investments, preferences is recommended for journalists
  - *Washington Times* prohibits reporters from participating in politics (protests, etc.)
- **Does a religion reporter have to be an atheist??**
Invasion of Privacy

- Violating person’s right to be left alone

- Right to know vs. Right to privacy
  - Neither are Constitutional rights

- Right to print vs. Good Taste
  - ??Motivation behind printing President’ Bush’s note @ UN meeting??
Naming crime/rape survivors

- Florida legislated against printing
- Law struck down by Florida District Court
  - Considered public record

- ??Does publishing re-victimize victim??
- ??What about if accusation is false??
Naming Juvenile offenders

- Traditional names have not been published
  - Entitled to “juvenile mistakes”
- Stigma may deter others
- ??Will notoriety encourage violations??
Withholding Information

- Not publishing known information
  - By choice
    - Compromising source access & confidentiality
  - By request
    - i.e. police investigating a crime

- ??What if information will eventually be known??
Plagiarism

- Using another’s work without crediting source

**How to…**

- Using material verbatim from:
  - Newspaper library
  - Wire service
  - Other publications
  - Press releases
- Using work of fellow reporters
- Recycling old stories
Avoiding…

- List source of borrowed info
- Distinguish between info & ideas
  - Attribute ideas
  - Put gleaned in your own words

“It is hard to say what’s worse—making up material or stealing it. Don’t do either. Ever.”
Deceit

- **Using deception to get a story**
  - Lying
  - misrepresenting yourself
  - using hidden recorder
  - stealing documents

- **Conditions justifying Deceit by Journalists**
  by Poyntner Institute of Media Studies

  - Issue of profound public importance
  - All other alternatives exhausted
  - Eventual full disclosure of deception
  - Full commitment to story by all involved
  - Harm prevented outweighs harm caused
  - Deliberate decision making
MODELS FOR ETHICS
Commission on Freedom of the Press

a.k.a. Hutchins Commission

- report written in 1947 by Robert M. Hutchins & other scholars
- 133-page report of press freedom and democracy

Basic premises:

- Media professionals enjoy special measure of freedom
  - Power & freedom = responsibility
- Society’s welfare is more important than individual rights
Hutchins Guidelines

1. Present meaningful news, separate from opinion
2. Provide forum for exchange of comment & criticism
3. “Representative of groups in society”
4. Clarify goals & values of society
5. Provide broad coverage of what is known
Solving Ethical Dilemmas

- **Principled reasoning**
  - Reflecting an ethical principle to determine proper (moral) way to act

- Action must be based on reason
  - “ethical” action more than doing what you are told

- Recognizes often not clear answer to ethical dilemmas
Potter’s Box

- Steps to analyzing ethical problems
- Model of moral reasoning
  - Developed by Dr. Ralph Potter of Harvard Divinity School
  - Adapted to journalism by Clifford Christians, Kim Rotzoll and Mark Fackler
Potter’s box

1. **Appraising situation**
   - Good decisions depend on good reporting.
   - Facts from a variety of sources to make a decision

2. **Identify values**
   - Know your values
   - Know values of organization, community & nation

3. **Appeal to ethical principles**
   - Be familiar with range perspectives

4. **Choosing loyalties**
   - Determine values which are paramount
Activity: *Personal Ethics Statement*

What is YOUR personal philosophical approach to dealing with ethical questions?

Devise a draft of you own personal statement of values and principles:

- Read "*Ethical guidelines keep journalists on track*" by Manning Pynn
- Make a list of the 2-3 values that mean the most to you
  - Follow Potter’s Box in determining values.
- Next make a list of 5-7 dos and don’t you would follow if you were a journalists
  - Include a sentence of explaining WHY for each point.
Sources

- American Society of Newspaper Editors website

- Dr. Heidi Campbell, Media Ethics lecture, Texas A & M University

- Steve Klein, Personal Ethics Statement PowerPoint, George Mason University

- Telling the Story by the Missouri Group