

JRN 101B/ 103G: News Literacy/SPRING 2010

Recitation: What do ethics have to do with it anyway?

PURPOSE: To give students an appreciation of the ethical dimension of journalistic decision-making. It's not just about accuracy, verification, fairness, etc. Journalists have tremendous power to help and hurt individuals and society. Sometimes, the hardest decisions involve what *not* to print or broadcast. Use the example of the Associated Press's decision to publish the photo of a dying American soldier, which has been harshly criticized by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and others, to spark discussion. It will be useful to connect the debate over the *New York Times* Swift case to today's discussion of different ethical cases. We give students an opportunity to make choices using hypothetical examples taken from real cases. Make sure to allow 45-50 minutes for the ethics part of the recitation

I. HOUSEKEEPING

- Attendance
- Quiz
- Reminders: My Life As 14th ; Test #2 week of 19th;

II. News Blog Discussion

- Students were supposed to post their reactions to the story about the AP publishing a photo of a dying US soldier (see the blog post and the linked-to stories). Ask them about their thoughts. Did the AP do the right thing? Why or why not? Do students agree with the critics? What standards of decency and ethics are being debated here? What would they do if in the editor's position?
- Once students have had their say, they will now have the opportunity to put themselves in the editors' shoes and confront a series of difficult ethical dilemmas.

III. Ethics Cases (takes about 45-50 minutes)

-- Use case study examples (and other examples from your own experience) to raise the issue of tough ethical choices journalists make every day. Point out how *self-censorship* is different from government censorship.

--Use the handout with nine ethical cases. You have a number of options on how to handle the nine cases. Can do some of them by breaking into groups or do all of them with the whole class.

In any case, each recitation should take one case study and be prepared to present a brief summary on what the class decided to do at the next lecture -- just a few minutes to explain decision. For the Monday lecture Rec 1 will take ethical case 1 for its presentation and so on. For Tuesday Rec 7 will take case 1. For Wednesday Rec 13 will take case 1. Ask for a volunteer to present the class decision.

- What did class decide?
- And why.
- What reasons for and against?
- If time, volunteer can do a run-through.

IV. **Optional, if time**

- In addition to the nine case studies we have the Nancy Grace CNN story in which she hounded a woman who then commits suicide and the story hoax (the fake admirer) that led to a suicide by Megan Miller. You might also discuss any other current cases that raise the issue of journalistic ethics (*To Catch a Predator*, etc.)

V. **Assignments**

- **None!**