

# Media Ethics

PHIL2730F

Department of Philosophy  
The University of Western Ontario

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Mondays and Wednesdays 1230-1500h

Office hours: Mondays 1000-1200h

or by appointment

## 1 Course description

The media play a significant role in informing citizens about issues, and enabling them to communicate and connect with one another. However, this power can raise difficult ethical issues that can have serious repercussions for society as a whole, or for particular individuals in it. This course will examine some of these issues, including: What should and shouldn't be reported in the news? How should the media balance an individual's right to privacy against the public's right to know? Does the media have an obligation to fight social injustice? What are a journalist's obligations to protect her sources? Should there be limits on advertising in the media?

The goals of this course are twofold: one is to learn about the ethical issues pertaining to the media; the other is for students to develop their ability to critically analyze these problems, to come to well-reasoned conclusions about how they should be addressed. To achieve these goals, classes will be a combination of both lecture and discussion of case studies, using the assigned textbook, *Media ethics: Cases and moral reasoning* (2011), Clifford G. Christians *et al*, 9th ed., Pearson Education, Inc., as well as supplemental material that will be made available on Webct.

## 2 Requirements

### 2.1 Critical Essays

Students will be given more detailed instruction in class about how to write their critical essays, as well as be provided with other resources, including a paper, “How to Write a Critical Essay,” which will be posted on Webct. Students are to write 3 essays that are each 4 pages in length, and will be worth **20% each** towards the student’s final grade. In their essays, students are to demonstrate that they have thought deeply and critically about an ethical issue that is of interest to them, as well as demonstrate their understanding of the material read and discussed in the course.

### 2.2 Final Exam

The final exam will be 2 hours long, and be scheduled by the Registrar’s Office. It will be worth **30%** of the student’s final grade. Questions may refer to any of the material that was covered throughout the entire course, including both lectures, readings, and supplemental material. Students will be given the questions that could appear on the exam in advance; the questions on the exam will be a subset of those questions. Students’ answers will be expected to show their breadth and depth of understanding of the course material.

### 2.3 Participation

Students will be given a grade of up to **10%** for their participation in the course. Consistent attendance and preparedness to discuss the material will be a necessary though not sufficient condition for participation marks. In addition, students’ grade will be assigned on the basis of whether their contribution to the class facilitates other students’ participation.

Students wishing to **audit** the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus cannot be used as grounds of appeal.