



## Field Ethics of Journalism

JOUR-3500 (3 Credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
**South Africa: Social and Political Transformation**

**PLEASE NOTE:** This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

### Course Description

This course examines how journalism ethics inform and shape reporting—both conceptual and practical—and equips students with skills for writing a news feature story in South Africa. Students will learn, as they critically examine, the origins, role, and rationales of South Africa’s journalism ethics as the lens through which they will explore journalism ethics more broadly at a global scale. Hands-on assignments require that students develop a story pitch on an important issue related to Social and Political Transformation in South Africa. Peer editing of the pitch, in collaboration with South African journalists, provides the experiential and practical context through which students gain deep insights into the ethical milieu that shape South African journalism. This pitch becomes the subject of the student’s Independent Study Project in Journalism (ISPJ). Class discussions, group activities, critical reflection, and individual meetings are facilitated by course instructors to draw out critical lessons.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be equipped to:

- Demonstrate a general understanding of the journalistic ethics and standards especially as practiced in a global environment;
- Show knowledge of the unique issues of journalism ethics involved in reporting from South Africa; and
- Produce a professional-quality pitch for the ISPJ with sharp attention to the highest professional standards and journalism ethics.

### Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, and students are exposed to vocabulary related to appropriate journalism writing and words in the isiZulu language which may be useful in field reporting in the South African context.

## Course Schedule

Field Ethics of Journalism in South Africa is structured in three interrelated thematic modules.

### Module I: Journalism Ethics

This module explores the strictest standards of journalism ethics with an emphasis on ethical issues in South Africa. The module involves ongoing reporting assignments with professor-guided peer edits, with a focus on journalism ethics. It also includes lectures and online seminars from professional editors, photographers, and reporters with insight into ethical components of professional journalism.

Students must take a series of online reporting tutorials developed especially for this program by the Poynter Institute, a premier journalism training organization based in the United States. The Poynter tutorials offer our students access to leading journalism educators and facilitates teaching of *Introduction to Ethical Decision-Making*, as part of this module. The module equips students with the basic techniques and tools they need to confront complex ethical issues and support their decisions.

#### Assigned Reading:

Anim van Wyk & Cunliffe-Jones Petter (2015) "New York Times & others STILL wrong on number of immigrants in S. Africa" - Africa Check. <https://africacheck.org/reports/new-york-times-use-plagiarised-article-to-back-up-sa-immigrant-number/>

Balliah, Dinesh (2015) "The dos and don'ts of covering children in the media". <http://www.journalism.co.za/blog/story-children-involved/>

Bird, William, (2015) "Kimberley schoolboy rape: A case study on the ethics of reporting on children". [www.thedailyvox.co.za/kimberley-schoolboy-rape-a-case-study-on-the-ethics-of-reporting-on-children/](http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/kimberley-schoolboy-rape-a-case-study-on-the-ethics-of-reporting-on-children/)

Krüger, F. (2004). *Black, white and grey: Ethics in South African journalism*. Cape Town, Double Storey.

Muthambi. (2016) "Journalists simply focus on scandalizing the ANC government". <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/media/2016/05/06/journalists-simply-focus-on-scandalising-the-anc-government-says-muthambi>

Retief, J. (2002). *Media ethics: An introduction to responsible journalism*. Cape Town, Oxford University Press.

Round Earth Media "REM Guidelines and Journalism Ethics". <http://roundearthmedia.org/pitch-guidelines-and-journalism-ethics/>

South Africa National Editor's Forum (SANEF) "South African Journalism Codes of Conduct and Ethics." [http://www.sanef.org.za/programmes/ethics/ethics\\_codes/](http://www.sanef.org.za/programmes/ethics/ethics_codes/)

The Press Council "Press Code." [www.presscouncil.org.za](http://www.presscouncil.org.za)

Wasserman, Herman "Emmanuel Sithole's Death Raises Questions about Media Ethics." The Daily Vox. (2015). [www.thedailyvox.co.za/emmanuel-sitholes-death-raises-questions-about-media-ethics/](http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/emmanuel-sitholes-death-raises-questions-about-media-ethics/)

## **Module 2: Law and Journalism in South Africa**

This module covers the journalistic landscape in South Africa: the press, the judiciary, and government policies.

The following are a sampling of the lectures students can expect. All will be delivered by respected scholars and recognized experts in the field. (Each lecturer is introduced by a student who researches this person as if he/she is conducting a journalistic interview. Students are expected to ask questions and interview the lecturer after his/her presentation.)

Potential lecturers include:

- Ferial Haffejee - Editor, City Press
- Khadija Magardie - former CNN Africa Journalist of the year
- Mondli Makhanya - former Mail & Guardian and Sunday Times editor

Sample lecture topics include:

- The SA Constitution and its provisions for freedom of speech, free press, hate speech etc. Compare this with the US constitution and the First Amendment, and how this plays out in the media and society in both countries.
- Good governance: how constitutional court operates in SA as a watchdog of democratic freedoms and caretaker of constitutional freedoms, including freedom of speech, press etc.
- Media ownership: look at diversity of media, diversity of media consumers, with a special focus on the importance of radio (townships, illiteracy, etc) and digital/mobile phone media. Analysis of media ownership, local and/or foreign, and distribution.

*Assigned Reading:*

Mzekandaba, Simnikiwe (2015) Muthambi eyes training for journalists. Web Audio and Video [http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=147084](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=147084)

Herbst Ed (2015) "Truth, Ethics and Plagiarism". The Media Online. <http://themediamonline.co.za/2015/03/truth-ethics-and-plagiarism/>

## **Module 3: A Professional Pitch**

During this module SIT Study Abroad students, paired with South African journalism trainees at The Times Media Group, produce an acceptable story pitch for their feature story (Independent Study in Journalism or ISPJ).

This typically requires at least five pitch revisions and numerous pitch sessions with professional journalists and the academic director. Students propose stories and receive reaction and advice from these acclaimed journalists. This is a particularly challenging module, affording students the rare opportunity to work directly with seasoned professionals. The focus is on finding a compelling, original journalistic story from South Africa.

Lectures include an unprecedented opportunity to Skype with a long-time editor for the *New York Times* about the reporter-editor relationship. That relationship will be a key component of the ISPJ.

Pitch sessions are with the AD and the advisors for this program which will include editors at the Times Media Group and journalists affiliated with Round Earth Media.

IRB Application: The IRB application must be completed in consultation with Round Earth Media professionals, as it directly relates to outside field reporting and the Independent Study Project. The application will be evaluated on the basis of scope and thoroughness, including sources, contacts, interview questions, methodological tools, and awareness of ethical issues.

### **Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

#### Description of Assignments:

Reporting assignments run concurrently with formal courses. Via field reporting assignments, students will be alerted to patterns, trends, and surprising activities. There will be exercises in observing, describing, and interviewing, all with the aim of developing original journalistic pieces in print, broadcast, or online media formats. Interview assignments may involve prominent journalists, NGOs, artisans, or the student's host family. For this course there will be close attention paid to the ethics and ethical challenges of doing these assignments.

Online tutorials: Students must complete the online tutorials satisfactorily by the deadlines set.

Assessment of a student's participation and attendance in the course will be based on the following criteria:

- Prompt attendance at all course activities and positive presence in all course environments.
- Active listening: paying attention in class/during field excursions, taking full advantage of a lecturers' knowledge by asking appropriate questions, entertaining contradictory perspectives, and taking notes. This includes asking our lecturers questions which should reveal students' understanding of the issues we're studying and the unique and important role of a journalist in gleaning information from interview subjects.
- Involvement in class discussions: sharing knowledge and information both in small or large groups.
- Students must show respect and participate in positive and full interaction with host institutions, learners, SIT program affiliates, local communities, and fellow students.

Please be on time for class. Tardiness will be penalized.

#### Assessment:

Reporting assignments: 60%

Online tutorials: 30%

Attendance and participation: 10%

### **Grading Scale**

The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100% A

90-93% A-

87-89% B+

84-86% B

80-83% B-

77-79% C+

74-76% C

70-73% C-  
67-69% D+  
64-66% D  
Below 64% F

#### Grading Criteria

A: Ready for publication or broadcast. Shows mastery of facts and elements. Story is compelling and original.

A-/B+: Accurate; contains all relevant material but may lack maximum precision and clarity in storytelling. May have spelling or grammar errors in text or lighting and sound problems in images and footage. The difference between an A- and B+ is the degree to which these occur.

B: Needs some editing, some minor rewriting, and minor production editing. All the elements are included. B-/C+: A significant problem or two somewhere in the analysis, focus, organization, shooting, and/or production. The difference between a B- and C+ is the degree to which these problems appear.

C: Missing facts and key information. Major re-editing/reshooting or post production editing necessary. Missing crucial elements.

C-: Very weak effort.

D: Overhaul required. Poor organization, reporting, shooting, and/or production. Major storytelling issues (including sourcing, imaging) and absence of critical thinking.

F: Failure to meet assignment requirements and standards. Missed deadline.  
Final grades will reflect plus (+) or (-) minus.

I = Incomplete

W = Withdrawal (student initiated) AW = Administrative withdrawal

Note: SIT does not award A+ grades

#### **General Expectations**

Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate fully in all lectures, course discussions, and field visits/educational excursions. In addition to completing the required readings and being able to discuss them with a lively curiosity, students are expected to read local, regional, and global newspapers and other media.

Assignments are designed to facilitate study, reflection, and analyses of trenchant issues of journalism in South Africa, utilizing all aspects of the program—lectures, seminars, field excursions, and research conducted during the semester. Grades are based on preparation and participation in all seminars, discussions, and activities; peer edits; and demonstrated completion of all assigned readings. Timely completion of all course assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized.

**Deadlines: Please make them. To receive full credit for an assignment, you must turn it in by the deadline.** *All written assignments should be sent by e-mail. Make sure you keep back up files so nothing gets accidentally lost or erased.*

Electronic devices: No texting, surfing, tweeting, or logging onto social media or the Internet while in class unless instructed specifically for an assignment.

Lectures: This is not only a chance to hear what experts have to say about important topics in South Africa, but also a chance to interview them. Do your homework before each lecture. Have questions ready. If it is your turn, be ready to introduce the lecturer. Your questions for the lecturers will be taken into account in your grade for the courses. A big part of doing good journalism is asking the right questions. Respect differences of opinion (classmates, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen and consider other perspectives with respect.

Academic Honesty Policy: This program has zero tolerance for plagiarism. Academic honesty is expected of all students. All quotes and source material must be properly attributed and verified. Your reporting must be original, truthful, accurate, and free of fabrication. Any work you present as your own must be your own. Violations of this policy include plagiarism, fabrication, and any other form of cheating.

Definitions and Examples:

**CHEATING:** The conscious use of unauthorized, prohibited, or unacknowledged materials or methods, including, but not limited to, checking mobile devices, computers, or notes during online tutorials or copying others' work.

**FABRICATING:** The conscious falsification or invention of information, quotes, sources, or any other material presented as non-fiction.

**PLAGIARIZING:** The conscious representation of someone else's work as your own. Please note that ANY failure to accurately and completely document ALL uses of source material constitutes academic dishonesty. You may use a quote from another source, but it must be attributed in journalistic style. Background and contextual information may NOT be taken from Wikipedia or many other online sites. When in doubt, discuss appropriate sourcing with me BEFORE submitting your assignment.

**THIS IS JOURNALISM: DO NOT MAKE UP ANYTHING** in work submitted in our program.

Communication: **It is your responsibility to know what's going on in the course.** This includes **checking EMAIL every day before class** for announcements, updates, and changes in our course schedule. **There will be changes. There will be new and/or additional assignments.**

**CARRY A NOTEBOOK WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES and a recording device. A CAMERA or other device for photos is ADVISABLE as you abide by program rules related to photography.**

**Refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the program materials given to you at Orientation.

**Please note:** the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may be modified by the academic director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants. **Students will be promptly notified of changes to class topics or lecturers.**

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.