Field Ethics of Journalism and Digital Media
JOUR-3500 (3 credits)

South Africa: Journalism and Digital Media

This syllabus is representative of a typical 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 South Africa's socio-political context, some three decades into democracy. 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 summer project in journalism. Course instructors facilitate class discussions, group activities, reflection sessions, and individual meetings to draw out critical lessons.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a general understanding of the journalistic and digital media 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 summer project with sharp attention to the highest professional standards and journalism and digital media 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.

Instructional Methods

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.

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs

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

Module 1: 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 and reporters with insight into ethical components of professional journalism.

Readings:

Wilkinson, K. (2015, July 15). *New York Times & others STILL wrong on number of immigrants in South Africa*. Africa Check. https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/reports/new-york-times-others-still-wrong-number-immigrants-south-africa

Krüger, F. (2004). Black, white and grey: ethics in South African journalism. Double Storey. Chapter 1-3.

Retief, J. (2002). *Media Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

The Press Council "Press Code." www.presscouncil.org.za

Wasserman , H. (2015, April 27). Emmanuel Sithole's death raises questions about media ethics. *The Daily Vox*. 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 - *Daily Maverick* editor
- Mondli Makhanya - former *Mail & Guardian* and *Sunday Times* editor
- Martine Barker – former Independent Newspapers Group 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.

Readings:

Mzekandaba, S. (2015, October 19). *Muthambi eyes training for journalists*. ITWeb.

http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=147084

Herbst, E. (2015, March 23). *Truth, ethics, and plagiarism*. The Media Online.
http://themediaonline.co.za/2015/03/truth-ethics-and-plagiarism/

Module 3: A Professional Pitch

In this module, students learn how to develop a pitch for a feature story or digital media piece.

This typically requires at least five pitch revisions and numerous pitch sessions with professional journalists and the academic director. Students will brainstorm story ideas and receive reactions and advice from 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.

Pitch sessions are with the AD and the advisors for this program which will include editors at the Times Media Group/*The Daily Maverick.*

Assignments and Evaluation

<u>Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria</u>

1) Field Assignments (50%)
Students will consult with their journalism course coordinator before embarking on any reporting project, as they will be directing and supervising all student-reporting in a newsroom setting. Field assignments take place at sites of interest in the unexpected corners of Durban, where students will be asked to be alert to patterns, trends, and surprising activities or people. There will be exercises in observing, describing and interviewing, all with the aim of developing skills to create original journalistic pieces in print, broadcast, or online media formats. Interview assignments may involve prominent journalists, NGOs, artisans, or the student's host family.

2) Field Notebook (20%)
The observations recorded here will be the student's primary source of story ideas. It should also reflect one's growth as a student journalist learning in an unfamiliar cultural setting. Students are expected to be constantly observing, analyzing, and reflecting on the environment around them. The notebook will be reviewed periodically throughout the semester.

3) Group-led processing session (20%)
Early in the course, students will be assigned to groups that will lead a course-processing session or lead a discussion session. Each team will organize and facilitate a discussion session built around one or two readings from a course topic.

4) Attendance and participation (10%)
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.
- Please be on time for class. Tardiness will be penalized.
- 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.
- Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program

Assessment
Field assignments - 50%
Field Notebook - 20%
Group-led Processing Session - 20%
Participation - 10%

Late Assignments
SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Grading Scale

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

Program 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 summer. 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.

- 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.

- Communication: It is your responsibility to know what's going on in the course. This includes checking e-mail *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 photo device is advisable as long as you abide by program rules related to photography.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#)section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](), [Disability Services](), [Counseling Services,]() [Title IX information](), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion]() resources.