



## The Peculiar Predicament for Teaching Journalism in the Era of Trump

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### The Peculiar Predicament for Teaching Journalism in the Era of Trump

Journalism is under attack. The very essence of the profession that is embedded within the history of America, has been reduced to frantic tweets and venomous outbursts, oftentimes from none other than the Commander-In-Chief himself. President Donald Trumps' rants are unfortunately taking hold in American culture.

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center shows Americans have only moderate trust in most news sources. ("Americans express only moderate trust in most news source types and continue to have much lower trust in social media," 2017) America is in unheralded territory. President Trump has become known for stating non-truths while labeling any unfavorable report about him or his administration as "fake news." He hides and attacks behind Twitter and boldly scoffs oftentimes in front of the camera. Former deputy secretary of state for the Obama administration, Antony Blinken, says that, "In times of crisis, credibility is an American president's most valuable currency." (Antony J. Blinken, 2017) In this regard, America's currency is worthless, and the press' role is more vital than ever.

How do journalism professors teach ethically and morally responsible journalism students in a time when the entire industry is demeaned, namely by the president himself? The answer is not black and white. The strategies used by journalism professors in today's volatile climate will affect the students' trajectories. However, it is a delicate balancing act. The intersection of pedagogy and practice for journalism professors can be an enigma of competing contrasts. It becomes difficult to teach basic principles of journalism, when the president and much of the public are vilifying the media, and going against the Society of Professional Journalists' first principle— to *seek truth and report it*. ("SPJ Code of Ethics - Society of Professional Jour-

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3 nalists," n.d.) Today's society is also one in which there exists an influx of anyone with a key-  
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5 board and blog calling oneself a journalist. In a world where opinion-based journalism is also  
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7 becoming the common denominator, ("In your face: The ethics of opinion journalism," 2011) it  
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9 becomes a challenge to mold ethical, thought-provoking journalists whose commitment to truth  
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11 trump their desire of having more likes, retweets, and Instagram followers.  
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15 Today, a tweet can become world headlines before a spellcheck is even conducted and a  
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17 rant on a blog post may be repeated as a lead story on a newscast, without the news outlet doing  
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19 its due diligence. This presents a precarious position for professors, because the ways in which  
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21 the media covers the news isn't always a great example for budding millennial journalists. In or-  
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23 der to be impactful, professors must return to the basics and teach the tenants of journalism,  
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25 while adding excitement for those who are entering into the profession. The need for focused  
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27 fact-checking and balance in telling both sides of the story, and doing so with great accuracy, is  
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29 more important now than ever before.  
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34 One example on how to reach this goal, is to include actual ethical dilemmas as a class-  
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36 room exercise. When introducing media ethics, my students are divided into groups where they  
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38 are given what appears to be far-fetched ethical situations. The groups must argue each side, us-  
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40 ing information presented in class. At the end of the exercise, I reveal that each scenario is based  
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42 on actual events which I encountered as a journalist. I then discuss how I handled the issue. The  
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44 exercise brings the cases and terms to life, and provides practical yet powerful teaching strate-  
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46 gies. I refer to this as sharing "the real deal." (In Roush & Association for Education in Journal-  
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48 ism and Mass Communication, 2018, p. 04)  
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52 Another pedagogical approach involves incorporating field trips which serve as a culmi-  
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54 nation to lectures and discussions. Each semester, my senior capstone students take a trip a few  
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3 miles away from campus to the Newseum. The visit becomes a culmination of the objectives  
4 they have learned during their matriculation through the Department of Media, Journalism and  
5 Film (MJFC)—from the impact of the First Amendment, to how many journalists defended those  
6 freedoms with their lives. The exhibit, “Civil Rights at 50” is one such exhibit. (“1968: Civil  
7 Rights at 50” | Newseum," n.d.) The students discuss how they may have covered the now-his-  
8 toric events as student journalists, or whether they would have participated as student leaders 50  
9 years ago. They also view a video on the role of the black press, and then discuss the quote by  
10 Civil Rights icon, U.S. Representative John Lewis: “If it not been for the press, the [Civil Rights]  
11 movement would have been like a bird without wings.” (“The Press and the Civil Rights Move-  
12 ment' Video Lesson," n.d.) After the tour, the students are assigned to write multimedia blogs on  
13 their ePortfolios encapsulating their experiences.

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Professors can also put pedagogy in practice by providing students unique opportunities, relevant to their institution. Being located in Washington, D.C., MJFC seniors had the opportunity to cover the White House alongside the press corps. They also reported from the 2016 Republican and Democratic National Conventions and subsequent presidential election. (“2016 Election Project," n.d.) Immediately following their assignments, the students shared how they handled ethical issues that arose, and how they strived to maintain parity in their coverage.

When journalism students leave the university they should understand why journalism is so deeply woven into the fabric of this county, and they should be compelled to tell the stories of those whose voices might otherwise not be heard. It is imperative to be candid with students; to let them see the professor’s human side. Give examples of why deadlines are the lifeline of the industry, and adhere to the standards that are set. There is a reason that journalism was first re-

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ferred to as the Fourth Estate. (Allan, 2012, p. 03) Journalists are to hold the government accountable and keep the public aptly informed. Despite the challenges, naysayers, and name-callers, journalism students should be excited to add their names to the noble profession when embarking on their careers. In turn, their professors should be re-energized at the end of each academic year, because they are able to effectively help their students' transition from classroom to newsroom or control room, while recognizing there are new pedagogical opportunities on the horizon.

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