

## **From Fellow Alums:**

Some topics that might be good to cover:

- Plagiarism and most recently in the news "self-plagiarism" (think Jonah Lehrer)
- Proper attribution: how, when, and why.
- On the record/ off the record/ on background/ etc
- Sensitive sources/ non-public figures: using full names versus anonymity, full disclosure to "normal folks", sensitivity and respect (don't burn your sources)
- Fact checking! Don't be caught looking like a fool.

I don't know if this directly falls under "ethics" but I think a lot about the way reporters share other people's stories:

I would also urge a reflective conversation about how certain people are often portrayed in the media as stereotypes or caricatures. This might make for sensationalist stories that play on societal tropes but it is bad reporting and I would argue bad for society.

I'm thinking here of characterizations in the media of people of color, people living in poverty, people with mental or physical disabilities, and LGBT people.

For example, I'm thinking the way people have wrote about Charles Ramsey. I'm also thinking about the way murders of transgender people are often written about in the media. It's often a dehumanizing characterization of "it" rather than a human being. I have lots of thoughts on this, I could go on for quite some time.

Although MMF probably won't be writing so much on beats where they would be writing about such things, science stories are often about people and folks should think about how they end up portraying them (either consciously or subconsciously).

## **From Rob Irion, Fellow Alum and Director of the UCSC Science Writing Program:**

Sounds like a great addition to the sequence. We kind of cover these topics in various ways throughout the year. Our main instructor who goes over issues that can get reporters tangled up is Martha Mendoza from AP. She brings in a First Amendment attorney, too, to cover libel and public/private figure differences.

Regarding conflict of interest: Yes, and for the orientation I think a key issue is recognizing when an editor will have a problem with your connections with a source. David should talk about what constitutes conflict for Science, which has strict policies. For example, if you are an intern (or a recent intern) at a university news office, can you report on research from that university for a journalistic outlet? (No.) Can you report on research arising from your former lab, or from the labs of young scientists who worked in the same lab where you are now working? (No -- and you shouldn't call them for comment, either.) Can you report on your own field? (Yes, as long as you obey the prior restrictions.) And so on.

Another potential minefield is showing copy to sources. Do you cover that already? Doing so violates the reporting policies of all daily newspapers, but some will permit you to read short sections to sources over the phone. Science magazine lets you show anything you wish to sources -- including articles in their entirety. Some magazines require all of this to go through fact-checking, and the reporter must supply annotated copy for the fact-checkers.

David also could cover the ethics of using quotes from news releases (OK for most outlets, but regarded as exceptionally lazy -- mostly done by "churnalists") and using quotes from email interviews (again, OK for most outlets, but many require the attribution to say so).

The First Amendment attorney is coming tomorrow and covering these topics, among others:

III. Limits: What can't you write, and what happens when you cross that line? The bottom line, there are three broad areas where you can get in trouble:

A. You can't lie about people if by doing so damages their reputation. That's known as libel or defamation. The case we'll be looking at will be *New York Times v Sullivan*, from 1964. It's a fascinating bit of American political history, and I've included it below. It helped create some very basic rules for acceptable journalism that you must learn and keep.

B. You can't publish things that are true if they invade the subject's privacy. How to draw that line is tricky, but the general rule is: The more famous the person is, the less privacy they have. Second rule: Common sense, and decency go a long way here.

C. National Security: State secrets can get you in trouble, though as you'll see the bar for the government is pretty high. See *Pentagon Paper* case, attached below.

IV. Copyright and IP law. A quick discussion of copyright law for bloggers and web journalists.

I hope this is all helpful, Dee, and good luck with your plans!

**From a Fellow Alum who was in the class with the First Amendment attorney Rob mentioned above:**

Like Rob mentioned, we covered libel and free speech today as it relates to the press. Really interesting stuff. There is a distinction between public officials and "real" people.

One interesting thing I learned here was as a journalist from our speaker today, "you have to intend to be telling the truth." And that some mistakes are envitable but you are not protected from being a lazy reporter and not doing your research.

Op-Eds are a little different in their libel rules.

Don't steal people's images if you're a blogger (it's good practice for anyone really).