

Proposal Submitted to *Journalism & Communication Monographs*

Topic: Media Ethics in Education

Thesis and Central Argument

The signature event in the United States in 1980 for media ethics revolved around the Hastings Center of New York. From 1978 to 1980, it carried out the most extensive study ever conducted of the status, problems and possibilities for teaching professional ethics in American higher education. The Hasting Project offered recommendations about the course goals, evaluations, indoctrination and teacher preparation that would be appropriate for the teaching of journalism ethics. At the same time, the MacBride Commission published “Many Voices, One World: Toward a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order” that sparked debates that have continued over the media’s international distribution, the political implications of their economic structures, and the impact of the World Trade Organization on communication flows.

This monograph will seek to provide a history of the scholarship in media ethics as a means of examining what has been occurring in media-ethics

education since the publication of these two reports in 1980. The paper will be based on a comprehensive review of books, and of scholarly and professional articles published within the field since that time. The analysis will demonstrate growth and productivity in five key areas--theory; social philosophy; religious ethics; technology; and truth—and identify issues that continue.

Significance of Research

Communications is a crucial laboratory for the exercise of public morality and professional ethics. It is not a discipline per se with a discrete subject matter; communications is pervasive and integrative rather than specialized.

Communications makes possible all cultural forms, all community life and socio-political institutions without being absorbed into any of them. Therefore, in today's wide-ranging assault on the foundations of knowledge, the communication infrastructure has no place to hide. Understanding how communicators are acculturated and socialized as performers within this infrastructure may provide needed insight into the functions and dysfunctions of today's forms of communication.

The number of free-standing media ethics courses grew by 86 percent between 1983 and 1993, and the expansion of these courses continues, on both the undergraduate and graduate level. Interest groups within academic associations, such as AEJMC and NCA, have been established, and several universities have established centers for the study of ethics and society. The *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* began publishing in 1985, providing a scholarly outlet for seminal research and writing in the field.

This study will help identify and assess the contributions of these educational and scholarly activities, thereby providing not only an important intellectual history but also serving as a means to identify the growth and the gaps of knowledge and practice. It will allow scholars within the field of journalism education and professional ethics to understand the congruencies of their fields and how they may differ. It should indicate the theoretical basis for a shared understanding.

Major Arguments/Premises

The research will use primary and secondary sources in historical research to explore five major areas of development within journalism ethics. The paper will first seek to evaluate what has been accomplished in the development and assessment of ethical theory. The primary principles or philosophical positions will be identified and their relationships within and to media education assessed. The question is: Has a “canon” of such principles emerged, and if so, what is it and how did it take shape?

A second area of analysis will include identification of the social philosophies that underlie ethical understandings. What is the relationship between morality and ethical behavior for public communicators? How has this relationship been explained or examined in the field’s scholarship?

Third, how religious or theological ethics are addressed or taught within this field will be explored. Have educators and scholars included such ethics in their discussions, and if so, in what ways? Is there a disconnect between religious

ethics and professional media ethics? Are both traditions accepted within classrooms and in scholarship?

The rapid changes in technology since the early 1980s have posed new questions for ethicists. In what ways has the consideration of technology informed or challenged media ethics? For example, is there a shared understanding of digital ethics (or print or broadcast ethics), and if so, what principles and practices are endorsed. How did these develop, and why? How does change in technologies affect the understanding of ethical principles and theories, and how quickly does education and scholarship reflect such change?

Last, the paper will explore how the nature and function of truth has been understood and taught, and the challenges within media-ethics education. Postmodern understandings of truth have prompted questions about the very nature of this value; how has that been reflected in teaching and scholarship?

Qualifications of the Scholar

The researcher has written and taught in the field of media ethics for more than 30 years, including authoring or co-authoring seven books. A full professor, he has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in media ethics at a research university and as a visiting scholar at three other institutions.

The idea for the proposal comes from a paper prepared for a National Summit on Media Ethics. The author acknowledges with gratitude contributions to the paper and this proposal by the sponsors of the conference.

References (list would follow)

