

ETHICAL CASE STUDY: What is conscientious journalism?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will evaluate the ethical content of a controversial news article using the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics as the framework for a case study.

SET UP

Assign the students to read an article or series of article in which the ethics of the reporting has been called into question. (Examples include The New York Times' reporting of the relationship between Sen. John McCain and a female lobbyist, reporter Judith Miller's pre-war reporting of Iraq's alleged weapons programs or Willamette Week's reporting of Portland Mayor Sam Adams' relationship with a young gay man.) The students should also conduct an Internet search for criticism of the reporting and read the Society of Professional Journalist's Code of Ethics.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

- Using the SPJ Code of Ethics as a framework, students will evaluate the author's success in each of the code's four main commands, citing the content of the original article, the comments of critics and the individual elements of the code.
- Students will construct an essay in which they will answer the question: Was the reporting of the article ethical?
- The essay will be e-mailed to the instructor.

SCORING BENCHMARKS

On Task: The student completed readings and turned in all parts of the assignment ahead of the deadline.

Information: The completed essay correctly identifies each of the four commands of the SPJ Code of Ethics and assesses the author's success in following those tenets, citing the content of the original article, the comments of critics and the individual elements of the code.

Composition: The essay is structured logically and is free of all spelling any grammatical errors.

Comprehension: The student has demonstrated a working knowledge of the SPJ Code of Ethics by correctly identifying information that supports or contradicts the code's tenets.

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