



Literature, Journalism, Writing, and Languages Department

JRN 3040 - Media Ethics and Law

Three Units

Fall 2026

Meeting days/times: MWF 11:00 am – 11:55 am

Meeting location: Cabrillo 101

Final Exam: Friday, 12/18, 10:30 am – 1:00 pm

Course Information	Specifics for the Course
Instructor title and name:	Lynn Walsh
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Office location and hours:	By request

PLNU Mission

To Teach ~ To Shape ~ To Send

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service is an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we strive to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

General Education Mission

PLNU provides a foundational course of study in the liberal arts informed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In keeping with the Wesleyan tradition, the curriculum equips

students with a broad range of knowledge and skills within and across disciplines to enrich major study, lifelong learning, and vocational service as Christ-like participants in the world's diverse societies and culture.

Course Description

The study of media law, ethics and the legal foundations that shape journalism and other media. Stresses responsible, fair, and accurate journalism and media practice.

Program and Course Learning Outcomes

1. Explain and apply First Amendment principles and relevant media law to contemporary journalism and information-sharing situations.
2. Analyze the significance of key court decisions and legal principles that have shaped American journalism, freedom of expression and the modern information ecosystem.
3. Evaluate legal and ethical challenges related to gathering, creating and distributing information, including issues involving defamation, privacy, access, intellectual property and newsgathering.
4. Apply ethical principles and decision-making frameworks to complex journalism and information-sharing situations and make fair, reasoned and well-supported judgments.
5. Demonstrate responsible and ethical professional practices in reporting, editing, newsgathering and the use of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.
6. Apply principles of transparency, accountability, audience engagement and community listening to ethical journalism practices and efforts to build and maintain public trust.

Required Texts and Recommended Study Resources

No required textbooks

Course Credit Hour Information

In the interest of providing sufficient time to accomplish the stated Course Learning Outcomes, this class meets the PLNU credit hour policy for a 3-unit class delivered over 16 weeks.

Assessment and Grading

Grades will be based on the following:

A	B	C	D	F
A 90-100	B 80-89	C 70-79	D 60-69	F Less than 59

Final Examination Policy

Successful completion of this class requires taking the final examination on its scheduled day. The final examination schedule is posted on the [Traditional Undergraduate Records: Final Exam](#)

[Schedules](#) site. If you find yourself scheduled for three (3) or more final examinations on the same day, you are authorized to contact each professor to arrange a different time for *one* of those exams. However, unless you have three (3) or more exams on the same day, no requests for alternative final examinations will be granted.

Incompletes and Late Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted/turned in by the beginning of the class session when they are due, including assignments posted in Canvas.

State Authorization

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on [State Authorization](#) to view which states allow distance education outside California.

PLNU Copyright Policy

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

PLNU Recording Notification

In order to enhance the learning experience, please be advised that this course may be recorded by the professor for educational purposes, and access to these recordings will be limited to enrolled students and authorized personnel.

Note that all recordings are subject to copyright protection. Any unauthorized distribution or publication of these recordings without written approval from the University (refer to the Dean) is strictly prohibited.

PLNU Academic Honesty Policy

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. For all student appeals, faculty and students should follow the procedures outlined in the University Catalog. Please consult the

[Academic Honesty Policy](#) in the [University Catalog](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

PLNU Academic Behavior Policy

Both faculty and students at Point Loma Nazarene University have the right to expect a safe and ordered environment for learning. Students are expected to take the initiative to learn and conduct themselves in a mature and civil manner in the classroom environment. Any student behavior that is disruptive or threatening is a serious affront to Point Loma Nazarene University as a learning community. Students who fail to adhere to these behavioral standards may be subject to disciplinary action, including removal from class or further university sanctions. For a full definition of disruptive behavior, response procedures, and the appeal process, please consult the [Academic Behavior Policy](#) in the [University Catalog](#).

PLNU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

You are allowed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini Pro GrammarlyGo, Perplexity, etc.) in this course. Any work that utilizes AI-based tools must be clearly identified as such, including the specific tool(s) used.

PLNU Academic Accommodations Policy

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center, [by email](#) or phone at 619-849-2533. Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will work with the student to create an Accommodation Plan (AP) that outlines approved accommodations. Professors are able to view a student's approved accommodations through Accommodate.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their approved accommodations in that particular course. Accommodations are not retroactive; as such, clarifying with the professor at the outset is one of the best ways to promote positive academic outcomes.

Students who need accommodations for a disability-related need should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. In accordance with ADA, accommodations cannot constitute a fundamental alteration to course outcomes; therefore, planning ahead is vital in establishing appropriate accommodations for equal access to this course. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC. Students cannot assume that because they had accommodations in the past, their eligibility at PLNU is automatic. All determinations at PLNU must go through the EAC eligibility process. This is to protect the privacy of students with disabilities who may not want to disclose this information and are not asking for any accommodations.

PLNU Attendance and Participation Policy

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions, the faculty member will issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university withdrawal date or, after that date, receive an “F” grade.

Use of Technology

Problems with technology do not relieve you of the responsibility of participating, turning in your assignments, or completing your class work.

Loma Writing Center

Getting feedback from the Loma Writing Center while you’re in the process of working on an assignment is a great way to improve the quality of your writing and develop as a writer. You are encouraged to talk with a trained writing consultant about getting started on an assignment, organizing your ideas, finding and citing sources, revising, editing for grammar, and polishing final drafts, and more.

Walk-ins are welcome, but we recommend making an appointment in advance. For information about how to make in-person or online appointments, see [Loma Writing Center webpage](#) or visit the Loma Writer Center on the first floor of the Ryan Library, room 221.

- [Appointment Calendar](#)
- [Website](#)
- [Email](#)

Assignments At-A-Glance/Canvas Course Summary

1. [Journalism survey](#): 25 points

Complete the assigned survey before class. As you take the survey, think about your own expectations, experiences, and concerns related to journalism, media, and the use of artificial intelligence. Come to class prepared to discuss your responses and what they reveal about how audiences may think about these issues. Your grade will be based on completing the survey and participating thoughtfully in the class discussion.

2. [Survey interview assignment](#) Part 1: 100 points

Ask five people to complete the assigned survey. This assignment should be more than simply sending someone a link and collecting their responses. Use the survey questions as the foundation for a conversation or informal interview.

Talk with each person about their answers. Ask follow-up questions when appropriate and try to better understand why they feel the way they do. You may need to explain or clarify questions, but avoid influencing their answers.

The goal is to move beyond simply collecting data and practice listening to members of an audience. Keep notes about each conversation, including important themes, surprising responses, questions, and differences of opinion.

You will use what you learn from these conversations in the next assignment.

3. [Survey interview assignment](#) Part 2: 200 points

Using the survey responses and conversations you conducted with five people, analyze what you learned about how people think and feel about the topics explored in the survey.

Identify key themes, areas of agreement or disagreement, surprising findings, and any differences you noticed among participants. Your analysis should go beyond simply summarizing what people said. Consider why people may hold these opinions and what their responses suggest about the relationship between journalists, technology, information, and audiences.

Based on your findings, develop recommendations for journalists and news organizations. What should journalists know about their audiences? What concerns or expectations should they take seriously? How could journalists better communicate, engage with, or build trust with the people they serve?

Your final submission should include both an analysis of your findings and clear, practical recommendations for journalists.

4. Write an AI use policy for yourself: 100 points

Develop a personal policy explaining how you will use artificial intelligence tools in your work as a journalist, communicator, or information creator.

Your policy should identify what uses of AI you believe are acceptable, what uses you would avoid or prohibit, and what steps you would take to ensure accuracy, transparency, accountability, and appropriate human oversight.

Consider questions such as: When is it appropriate to use AI? When should AI-generated material be verified? When should audiences be told that AI was used? What responsibilities do you have when using an AI tool?

Your policy should reflect your own ethical principles while also demonstrating your understanding of the legal, ethical, and professional issues discussed in class.

5. Evaluate an AI tool with journalism ethics in mind: 50 points

Select an AI tool that could be used by a journalist, communicator, or content creator and evaluate it using the ethical principles discussed in class.

Explain what the tool does and how it could be used. Then identify potential benefits, risks, and ethical concerns. Consider issues such as accuracy, bias, privacy, copyright, transparency, accountability, harm, and human oversight.

Your evaluation should conclude with your recommendation: Should journalists use this tool? If so, under what conditions or limitations?

6. Write disclosure AI tool: 50 points

Using the AI tool you evaluated, write a clear disclosure explaining how the tool was used in the creation or production of a piece of journalism or other information.

Your disclosure should be written for an audience, not for a professor. It should clearly explain what role AI played, what role the human journalist or creator played, and any steps taken to verify, review, or oversee the final work.

The goal is to practice communicating transparently about the use of AI in a way that is meaningful and understandable to the people receiving the information.

7. Election coverage assignment: 50 points

Identify examples of election coverage that you believe demonstrate either strong or problematic journalistic practices. Select at least one example you consider effective and one example you believe could have been handled differently.

Analyze each example using legal and ethical principles discussed in class. Consider issues such as accuracy, fairness, misinformation, sourcing, context, false balance, transparency, language, harm, and the potential impact on audiences.

Explain what the journalists or news organization did well or poorly and make recommendations for how election coverage could be improved.

8. Social video/content about your ethics: 200 points

Create a video, social media post, or other piece of public-facing content that explains your personal approach to ethics as a journalist, communicator, or information creator.

Your content should communicate what values guide your work and how you make decisions when faced with difficult ethical questions. Consider topics such as accuracy, fairness, transparency, accountability, independence, minimizing harm, audience engagement, or the responsible use of AI.

This assignment is not simply about listing ethical principles. Your goal is to communicate your values in a way that is clear, engaging, and meaningful to an audience.

You may use the format and platform that best fits your message, but your final project should demonstrate both thoughtful ethical decision-making and effective communication.

9. Quizzes: court cases or legal issues: 10 points

Throughout the semester, you will complete short quizzes designed to help you learn and apply important media law and ethics concepts.

Quizzes may cover key legal terms, court cases, ethical principles, and current issues discussed in class. Rather than focusing only on memorization, quizzes may also ask you to apply what you have learned to a hypothetical or real-world situation.

These quizzes are intended to help you build and reinforce the foundational knowledge needed to make informed legal and ethical decisions.

10. [Final assignment](#) (grading rubric [here](#)) - Week of December 7 due and presentations all week