

Mavis Richardson, PhD
Capstone Project
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)
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Course: MASS 411 Ethics and Press Criticism

This course is designed for people who plan careers in the mass media. This class is designed to stimulate your thinking beyond the mechanics of covering, reporting, and editing stories or representing clients in the fields of advertising and public relations to thinking about the audience to whom the media are presenting the words, pictures, and sounds you prepare. Specifically, the class should help you to:

- Gain insights into why the mass media perform as they do and to assess the social implications of that performance.
- Understand contemporary issues of mass communication, including credibility gaps, invasion of privacy, the ethics of persuasion and analysis and criticism of the mass media's ethics and performance.
- Appreciate some of the difficulties of media decision-making, such as conflicts among responsibilities to the public, the client, the information source, and your media organization, and the balance between society's right to know and its need to know.

Unit: Paper 2 topic: "Shattered Glass" movie (Lions Gate Entertainment, 2003). The movie is based on the journalism career of Stephen Glass. The paper should be 2-3 pages in length, double-spaced with 1-inch margins.

Assignment Guidelines: After viewing the movie "Shattered Glass," choose one of the characters listed below as the focus of the paper:

- Stephen Glass, main character/writer for The New Republic
- Chuck Lane, editor of The New Republic
- Caitlin Avey, associate editor of The New Republic
- Michael Kelly, former editor of The New Republic
- Adam Peneberg and Andie Fox, writers for Forbes Magazine

Your paper should address each of the following questions:

1. What ethical philosophy or philosophies did the character follow in making his/her decisions? Provide examples to support your claims.
2. Place yourself in your character's position. How would you have handled the situation? Use Potter's Box or Rawl's Veil of Ignorance to formulate and answer this question.
3. Overall, what are your impressions of the film? Does it have value for an ethics class? Should the film be shown again for future classes? Why?

Lesson Objectives: Development of critical thinking skills may take various forms. This assignment attempts to accomplish that goal by using a medium familiar to students (movie) that

presents a “real life” lesson: writing and publishing fabricated stories as truth to the reading audience. Students are required to view the movie, “Shattered Glass,” for the purpose of evaluating and applying the various philosophies and ethical decision-making tools presented thus far in the semester during lecture and discussed in small and large group discussions. The movie “Shattered Glass” is a study of a talented writer who produced dozens of articles for The New Republic, George, Rolling Stone, Harper’s, Policy Review, and New York Times magazines from 1995 until 1998. Glass was fired from The New Republic after it was discovered by Forbes magazine writers that he had committed a massive journalistic fraud: he had partly or completely fabricated sources and facts in many of his stories.

Prior to viewing the movie, information is presented about Stephen Glass and his career. In addition, the paper guidelines are also distributed and briefly discussed. Students must use examples from the movie to support their arguments presented in the paper.

During the next scheduled class period, an interview Mr. Glass gave for a “60 Minutes” segment was shown. This provided an opportunity for students to hear from Mr. Glass himself the reasons why he decided to fabricate his stories. It also provided an opportunity for the open exchange of ideas and discussion of the ethical issues raised in the movie among the students.

Personal responses to this assignment:

1. It is an up-to-date movie with relevant issues concerning our class material. The movie gives numerous examples of the ethical questions that a future journalist could encounter.
2. It fit very well into our discussion of ethics as it pertains to journalism. I felt it displayed many of the philosophies we discussed and it was interesting to put myself into the place of Chuck Lane to “What would I do?”
3. Overall, I thought the movie was a really great learning tool for our class. I think it has a great amount of value for a class like this because it shows general ethics being challenged and how different people with different ethical philosophies handle similar situations. The movie is basically what we have learned/are learning put into motion and applied to a real life situation.
4. This was a valuable film to watch for an ethics class and discussion due to its perfect portrayal of everyday difficulties and interactions among colleagues in a journalistic setting. The film also provided good examples of how various philosophical viewpoints can be practiced in reporting. Although I did not agree with the viewpoints of many of the characters, it was interesting to witness the practice of philosophies that I do not generally follow. “Shattered Glass” perfectly shows how much responsibility a journalist has to his/her magazine, colleagues and the general public.
5. Besides finding the film entertaining, I think it was one of the most valuable lessons we’ve learned. Having the background of what we have learned in lecture and textbooks made the video all the more relevant to real life lessons. Not only was I able to see the ethical decisions that have to be made and see how they are played out, but I also took away the importance of why telling the truth is vital in journalism. I would fully recommend showing the video in future classes, especially after giving a background of ethical philosophies in order to give a richer understanding of the movie.

Ethics Paper 2

We have just viewed the movie “Shattered Glass.” Your topic for Paper 2 is as follows:

Choose one of the following characters from the movie: Stephen Glass, the main character; Chuck Lane, editor of The New Republic; Caitlin Avey, associate editor for The New Republic; Adam Penenberg or Andie Fox, writers for Forbes, (do as a group) or Michael Kelly, former editor of the New Republic. Using various sources such as lecture notes, textbooks or other sources, answer the following questions:

1. What ethical philosophies did the character follow in making his/her decisions? Provide examples from the movie to support your claims.
2. If you were in that character’s position, how would you have handled the situation? I suggest using Potter’s Box or Rawl’s Veil of Ignorance to formulate and then answer this question.
3. Overall, what are your impressions of the movie? Does it have value for an ethics class? Should I use this again for future classes? Do you have other movie suggestions?

Length of the paper should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, using 12 point font with one-inch margins. Due date is **Friday, March 30**.