



**JLS 712**

**MEDIA LAW  
AND ETHICS**

**Course Guide**



**JLS712**  
**MEDIA LAW AND ETHICS**

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## Introduction

### Welcome to JLS712: Media Law and Ethics.

This course is a three-credit unit course for postgraduate students in journalism. The materials have been developed with the Nigerian context in mind. This course guide gives you an overview of the course and also provides you with information on the organization and requirements of the course.

## Course Aims

The aims of this course are to help you understand the legal and ethical principles which should guide a journalist in the performance of his professional duties in Nigeria. These broad aims will be achieved by:

1. Introducing you to the essence and purpose of law and ethics in any society
2. Introducing you to the philosophical foundations of media law and ethics
3. Acquainting you with the essential legal and ethical provisions to guide the Nigerian journalist's conduct as a professional.

## Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, JLS 604 also has specific objectives. The unit objectives are at the beginning of each unit. I advise that you read them before you start working through the unit. You can also refer to them during your study of the unit to check your progress.

Below are the broader objectives for the course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should consider yourself as having met the aims of the course. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to do the following:

- Define law and ethics and understand their purpose in society
- Understand the important theories of ethics
- Understand why the media of every country are regulated
- Know the essential media laws in Nigeria
- Know the code of ethics of the Nigerian Press Organization (NPO)
- Know the defences open to a journalist in the event of litigation
- Know the cardinal journalistic principles or canons of journalism
- Know the ethical mechanisms in Nigerian journalism and how they operate
- Be acquainted with some ethical case studies in Nigerian journalism.

## Working Through This Course

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a note book, a copy of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, among other materials listed in this guide.

At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit assignments for assessment. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

## Course Materials

The major materials you will need for this course are:

- Course guide
- Study units
- Assignment file
- A copy of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- Code of Ethics of the Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO)
- The National Broadcasting Code
- Code of Ethics of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations
- Code of Ethics of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON)
- Relevant text books, including those listed under each unit
- You also need to read newspapers and magazines, listen to radio and watch television regularly.

## Study Units

There are 21 units of six modules in this course. They are listed below.

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Module 1</b> | <b>The Purpose Of Law And Ethics In The Society</b> |
| Unit 1          | The Meaning and Purpose of Law                      |
| Unit 2          | The Essence and Purpose of Ethics                   |
| Unit 3          | Theories of Ethics                                  |
| Unit 4          | The Regulation of the Mass Media                    |

**Module 2      Press Freedom And The Constitutional Obligations Of The Nigerian Media**

- Unit 1      Press Freedom: History, Definitions, Legal bases and Constraints
- Unit 2      Public Officers, Public Figures, National Interest and The Public Interest
- Unit 3      Constitutional Provisions on the Obligations and Ownership of the Media in Nigeria

**Module 3      The Universal Press Laws**

- Unit 1      Defamation and its Essentials
- Unit 2      Classes of Defamation
- Unit 3      Defences to Defamation
- Unit 4      Sedition

**Module 4      Copyright, Contempt, National Security and the Official Secrets Act**

- Unit 1      Copyright
- Unit 2      Contempt of Court and Parliament
- Unit 3      National Security
- Unit 4      The Official Secrets Act

**Module 5      The Canons Of Journalism**

- Unit 1      Truth and Fairness
- Unit 2      Objectivity and Integrity
- Unit 3      Other Canons: Independence, Responsibility and Accuracy

**Module 6      Ethical Problems, Ethical Mechanisms And Ethical Case Studies In Nigerian Journalism**

- Unit 1      Ethical Problems in Nigerian Journalism
- Unit 2      Purpose and Kinds of Ethical mechanisms
- Unit 3      Regulatory Mechanisms and Ethical Case Studies

**Textbooks and References**

A number of books and other materials have been recommended for a good understanding of this course. You will see them at the end of each unit. Indeed, they were the books the course developer consulted while the course text was being prepared. You are advised to obtain them and other relevant ones for further reading.

## **Assessment File**

Two kinds of assessment are involved in this course: Tutor-Marked Assignments and a written examination. Although the answers to the Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs) are not meant to be submitted, yet they are as important as the Tutor-Marked Questions. The SAEs give you an opportunity to assess yourself and know to what extent you understand each topic. But the Tutor-Marked Assignments are to be answered and submitted for marking. The work you will submit to your tutor for assessment will weigh 30% of your total score.

## **Tutor-Marked Assignments**

You will be required to submit a specified number of TMAs. Each unit in this course has a TMA. You should attempt all the questions, and you will be assessed on all of them but the best four performances will be used for your 30% weighting.

After you have completed each assignment, send it together with a Tutor-Marked Assignment form, to your tutor. Please ensure that each assignment reaches your tutor before the deadline for submission.

If you have a genuine reason for not completing your work on time, contact your tutor to see if he or she can give you an extension. Normally, extensions may not be granted after the deadline. Since a commitment to deadline is the soul of the journalistic enterprise, journalism students are trained to meet deadlines.

## **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for JLS 604: Media Law and Ethics will be a test of three hours, which will carry a score of 70%. The examination will be set from all the topics covered, and will reflect the kind of self-assessment exercises and tutor-marked questions you encountered. You should revise the entire course and review all your self-assessment questions and tutor-marked assignments before the examination.

## **Course Marking Scheme**

The following table lays out how the actual course marking is broken down.



| <b>ASSESSMENT</b>   | <b>MARKS</b>  |
|---|---|
| Assignment 1-4 (the best four of all the assignments submitted) | Four assignments, best three marked out of 10%<br>Totalling 30% |
| Final Examination   | 70% of overall course score                                     |
| Total   | 100% of course score  |

### Course Overview / Presentation Scheme

| <b>UNITS</b>    | <b>TITLE OF WORK</b>  | <b>WEEK<br/>ACTIVITY</b> | <b>ASSESSMENT<br/>(END OF UNIT)</b> |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Module 1</b> | <b>The Purpose Of Law And Ethics In The Society</b>                                       |                          |                                     |
| Unit 1          | The meaning and purpose of law  | Week 1                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 2          | Essence and purpose of ethics   | Week 2                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 3          | Theories of Ethics  | Week 3                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 4          | The Regulation of the Mass Media  | Week 4                   | Assignment 1                        |
| <b>Module 2</b> | <b>Press Freedom And The Constitutional Obligations Of The Nigerian Media</b>             |                          |                                     |
| Unit 1          | Press Freedom: History, Definitions, Legal bases and Constraints                          | Week 5                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 2          | Public officers, public figures and the public interest                                   | Week 6                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 3          | The Constitutional Provisions on the Obligations and Ownership of the Nigerian mass media | Week 7                   | Assignment 1                        |
| <b>Module 3</b> | <b>The Universal Press Laws</b>   |                          |                                     |
| Unit 1          | Defamation and its Essentials   | Week 8                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 2          | Classes of Defamation   | Week 9                   | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 3          | Defences to Defamation  | Week 10                  | Assignment 1                        |
| Unit 4          | Sedition  | Week 11                  | Assignment 1                        |
| <b>Module 4</b> | <b>Copyright, Contempt National Security And The Official Secrets Act</b>                 |                          |                                     |
| Unit 1          | Copyright   | Week 12                  | Assignment 1                        |

|                 |   |         |              |
|-----------------|---|---------|--------------|
| Unit 2          | Contempt of Court and Parliament  | Week 13 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 3          | National Security and the Media   | Week 14 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 4          | The Official Secrets Act  | Week 15 | Assignment 1 |
| <b>Module 5</b> | <b>The Canons Of Journalism</b>   |         |              |
| Unit 1          | Canons of Journalism: Truth and Fairness  | Week 16 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 2          | Objectivity and Integrity   | Week 17 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 3          | Other canons: Independence, Responsibility and Accuracy                                     | Week 18 | Assignment 1 |
| <b>Module 6</b> | <b>Ethical Problems, Ethical Mechanisms And Ethical Case Studies In Nigerian Journalism</b> |         |              |
| Unit 1          | Ethical problems in the Nigerian Journalism   | Week 19 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 2          | Purpose and kinds of Ethical Mechanisms   | Week 20 | Assignment 1 |
| Unit 3          | Self-regulatory Mechanisms and Ethical Case Studies   | Week 21 | Assignment 1 |
|                 | Revision  | Week 22 |              |
|                 | Examination   | Week 23 |              |
|                 | TOTAL   | WEEKS   |              |

## What You Will Learn In This Course

This course guide is designed to show you what you will be doing in this course and to prepare you adequately for the task ahead. It is essential that you read the course guide carefully and be familiar with its contents. This will enable you to get your work properly done and get the best out of the course.

**Media Law and Ethics** equips the prospective journalism professional with the basic legal and ethical safeguards to perform his or her job within the acceptable legal and ethical boundaries. Ignorance of the law is not a defence for breaking the law. Nor can ignorance be a defence for the violation of the code of ethics of any profession. It is for this

reason that the professional must be conversant with what is legally and ethically expected of him.

### **What You Will Need For The Course**

You need material and non-material things for this course. The material things you need include but are not limited to the following:

- i) A standard dictionary, such as the Oxford Advanced Learners.
- ii) A copy of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- iii) A copy of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.
- iv) A copy of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights
- v) All the recommended text books on media law and ethics.

The non-material things you need for the course include but are not limited to the following:

- A) At least four continuous, uninterrupted hours of study weekly.
- B) Self-discipline and commitment to excellence.
- C) Integrity required of a scholar.

### **Tutor and Tutorials**

Fifteen hours of tutorials are provided in support of this course. You will be informed of the dates, times and location of the tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will grade, comment on your assignment, and monitor your progress. Don't forget to send your tutor-marked assignments well ahead of the deadline. They will be graded and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by phone or email if you need help.

You should contact your tutor if:

- a) You do not understand any part of the assigned readings
- b) You have difficulty with the self-assessment exercises
- c) You have a question or a problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comment or with the grading of an assignment.

Try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only way to have face to face contact with your tutor and ask questions. You can raise any problem you encountered in the course of your study. To gain maximum benefit from the course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending the tutorials. Also, it will be in your best interest to participate actively in the tutorials.

## **Conclusion**

This is a particularly interesting course that opens your eyes to many things about law and ethics which you must have been seeking answers to. It also gives you a great insight into the secrets of success in life, how to be law abiding and observe all the ethical principles which you require to excel not only in your chosen profession but also in life generally.

From what you may have noticed from the news media and from films, you can see that lack of self-discipline and/or ignorance of the law has led to the wrecking of many promising careers. If you take to heart and apply all that you have learnt in this course, you will not only excel in journalism but also succeed in life.

## **Summary**

This course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. The course teaches you the fundamental principles of law and ethics relevant to the practice of journalism in Nigeria.

We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful.