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*Journalism* published online 24 July 2012  
DOI: 10.1177/1464884912454503

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# The effectiveness of the pervasive method in ethics pedagogy: A longitudinal study of journalism and mass communication students

Journalism

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DOI: 10.1177/1464884912454503

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**Jacob Groshek**

University of Melbourne, Australia

**Michael Conway**

Indiana University, USA

## Abstract

This study answers Christians' (1978) call for research on the 'pervasive method' of ethics instruction. Longitudinal student surveys identified a robust level of concern and suggested penalties for the core ethical issues of plagiarism and fabrication in professional media careers that increased as students progressed through their program of study. Similar, positive findings were also observed among students from many disparate areas of vocational interest. Qualitative instructor assessments of specific techniques for teaching ethics in an introductory skills course and a senior-level capstone seminar further explicate observed increases in students' ethical growth. Results suggest that the pervasive model as an approach to ethical instruction through socialization can be effective in advancing students' ethical development.

## Keywords

fabrication, media ethics, pedagogy, pervasive method, plagiarism, socialization

More than three decades ago, one of the first surveys concerning ethics instruction in United States journalism and mass communication programs showed that just over a quarter of the programs offered a separate ethics course, while the rest taught ethics

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## Corresponding author:

Jacob Groshek, University of Melbourne, School of Culture and Communication, Department of Media and Communication, Melbourne, Australia.

Email: [jgroshek@gmail.com](mailto:jgroshek@gmail.com)

across the curriculum, a strategy later dubbed ‘the pervasive method’ (Christians, 1985: 18). Ethics scholar Clifford Christians called for research and inquiry into both approaches to help define ‘the ideal program of ethical instruction’ (1978: 24). The intervening decades have seen an explosion of interest in ethics research and instruction, but almost all of the emphasis has been on the dedicated ethics course, with comparatively little attention to the pervasive method.

This longitudinal survey project is an attempt to help understand if and how students’ attitudes about specific, fundamental media ethical issues – plagiarism and fabrication – change during their years in a program that employs the pervasive method of ethics pedagogy. In one of the most extensive studies ever undertaken to measure students’ ethical beliefs, which includes over four years of data and over 5000 student responses, this project specifically examines media ethics in key courses in the program and across the educational experience.

## Literature review

Interest in mass communication ethics research and instruction followed an overall increase in attention to moral development during the second half of the 20th century. In this period, scholars began to build on the earlier work of researchers including Emile Durkheim and Jean Piaget. Durkheim focused on the role of authority figures, including individuals, groups and society, to make rules and create structures to guide individual actions (1961). Piaget studied the individual and developed a hierarchy of phases through which people could progress in their moral development (1963[1952]). Lawrence Kohlberg advanced Piaget’s work with an emphasis on cognitive development, using a stair-step model of six stages and three levels to explain moral development.

Kohlberg’s (and Piaget’s) approach attracted attention because of the emphasis on the moral development of the individual, instead of socialization in general (Gibbs and Schnell, 1994). Kohlberg presented subjects with ethical dilemmas and then recorded their responses. Those responses would place the subject somewhere within the three levels of preconvention, conventional, and postconventional/principled development. Kohlberg and others embarked on a 20-year longitudinal study of individuals to refine the theory and study how the individuals progressed through the moral development stages (Colby et al., 1983; Kohlberg, 1976, 1981, 1994; Kohlberg et al., 1983).

Turning to research specifically focused on moral development during the college years, one of the most popular studies in the late 1950s did not offer much encouragement on the impact of an individual instructor or even method of instruction. Philip Jacob pulled together decades of research and visited several campuses to learn about the values of the students (Jacob, 1957; Rich and DeVitis, 1994). The results were less than encouraging. Jacob found students to be mostly self-centered: ‘They intend to look out for themselves first and expect others to do likewise’ (1957: 1). While the students’ values may change during the college years, Jacob’s research indicated little difference could be attributed to the type of education, liberal arts or vocational, or even the individual instructors: ‘the quality of teaching has relatively little effect upon the value-outcomes of general education ... so far as the great mass of students is concerned’ (1957: 7).

A more optimistic view of college experience and the potential impact of instruction on moral development emerged in the late 1960s, with scholars turning to the work of Piaget and Kohlberg. Arthur Chickering came up with seven vectors of development that students use to form an identity. The vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, and developing integrity. William Perry interviewed students at Harvard and Radcliffe in a longitudinal study and developed a nine-position continuum of development. In Perry's construct, many students start at a position of duality, in which they believe that there is a clear right and a wrong answer to ethical questions. More advanced positions include multiplicity and relativism as students realize the complexities of meaning-making (Perry, 1968; Rich and DeVitis, 1994).

A recurring criticism of many of these theoretical approaches was the difficulty in measuring how individuals qualified for specific stages, vectors, or positions of moral development. James R. Rest and others at the University of Minnesota opted for a more fluid set of schemas to explain the levels of development, including personal interest, maintaining norms, and postconventional schemas. Rest and his group also developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to help clarify the measurement issues. One of the measurements from the DIT is the 'principled score' or p-score, which plots moral development on a scale from 0 to 95 (Rest, 1994a; Rest et al., 1999).

Thousands of studies have been conducted using Kohlberg's stages and/or the DIT and two of the strongest predictors of moral development found repeatedly in the research are age and education. These studies have generally shown that as long as a person stays in school, moral development continues: as soon as schooling stops, the development plateaus (Colby et al., 1983; Rest, 1994a; Wilkins and Coleman, 2005). Rest notably argued that through the entirety of these experiences, moral development can be one of the strongest outcomes of higher education: 'gains in moral judgment are among the largest, most impressive gains of all tested variables influenced by the college experience' (Rest, 1994a: 15).

The rise in concern for ethics instruction in journalism and mass communication programs in the USA followed the dramatic upheavals in politics, media, and society in the 1960s and 1970s (Lambeth et al., 2004). The 1977 survey of ethics instruction was followed by two major projects released in 1980: a UNESCO report on international media policies and the Hastings Center's two-year study on teaching ethics in higher education (Christians, 2008; Christians and Covert, 1980; Lambeth et al., 2004; MacBride et al., 1980). The next year, the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* debuted with a goal of 'bridging real and imagined gaps between media professionals and academics who have practical and philosophical concerns over the ethical performance of the mass media' (1985: 2). By the mid-1980s, with the growing number of dedicated courses, books, and research articles, media ethics had become a 'growth industry' (Christians, 1985: 17).

In the first survey to examine ethics instruction in journalism programs at universities, almost three-quarters of these programs surveyed reported that they used the pervasive method of teaching ethics, instead of a dedicated ethics course. Even though the author, Christians, encouraged research into both approaches, the final sentence in the article makes clear his position: '... one alternative has the larger numbers, but the other side appears to have the better case' (1978: 24). Since then, the number of journalism and mass communications programs increased dramatically, by 24 percent, between the first

such survey in 1977 and the third panel conducted in 1993. With an 80 percent response rate, 158 schools offered at least one dedicated ethics course in 1993, and fewer than 40 percent of the programs reported using the pervasive method (Lambeth et al., 1994). By 2001, when the most recent panel in this line of ethics surveys was conducted, the pervasive method was not even mentioned as an approach to teaching ethics. Yet in the 2001 survey, the number of ethics courses had dropped by 31 in eight years, from 183 to 152 dedicated ethics courses.<sup>1</sup> The authors attributed the drop to a much lower survey response rate (Lambeth et al., 2004).

With top media ethics scholars championing the dedicated ethics course, subsequent research has followed that lead. Instructors and scholars related or studied approaches and student responses to dedicated ethics courses (in some cases the researcher and course instructor are the same, although methodologies are not always transparent on this connection), while survey research focused on the various incarnations of the dedicated course, at the exclusion of other approaches (Christians, 2008a; Christians and Lambeth, 1996; Kostyu, 1990; Lambeth et al., 1994, 2004; Lee and Padgett, 2000; Merrill, 1978; Plaisance, 2007).

During the same decades that the dedicated ethics course was gaining favor, journalism and mass communication programs were undergoing a radical shift in direction and purpose. By 1980, broadcasting, public relations and advertising students combined accounted for a larger percentage of students than those interested in newspaper careers (Roepke, 1981). In a recent survey that measured journalism and mass communication majors at universities, the most popular specializations were journalism (all platforms) at 14.5 percent, public relations (14.4%), telecommunications (8.7%), and advertising at 7.5 percent (Becker et al., 2010).

With such a diversity of vocational interests, one question has been how one ethics course can serve the needs of all students. Kolb (1981) noted that liberal arts/humanities programs tended to attract students with different learning styles, when compared to the physical sciences and engineering. Scholars have highlighted the different ethical concerns of public relations and advertising professionals when compared to journalists (Bivens, 1991; Christians, 1978; McBride, 1989). Over the years, mass communication ethics textbooks have added chapters concerning public relations and advertising (Leslie, 2004) and the trend is now toward a full integration of the professions within the text (Patterson and Wilkins, 2011; Plaisance, 2009).

Apart from the attention to the dedicated ethics course, other ethics research has focused on how both professionals and students feel about specific ethical situations that can arise both in school and the professional world. Using this approach, researchers rarely identify the specific method of ethics instruction and instead focus on the student responses (Hanson, 2002). Reinardy and Moore (2007) found students to have higher ethical standards when they started their college career than when they were ready to graduate. In Shipley's (2009) survey of students' ethical concerns, students that had been in school longer tended to be more concerned about ethical issues and expected harsher penalties than newer students. Among incoming British journalism students, women tended to be less tolerant of practices that could be considered an invasion of privacy than men (Ball et al., 2006). In many studies of journalism students and professionals outside of the USA, instead of focusing only on instructional methods, the projects

include ethics along with other values and issues facing the profession (Hanna and Sanders, 2007; Sanders et al., 2008).

The influence of professionals on student ethical views is also an important component since students not only hear about ethical situations from their future professions, many are also gaining first-hand experiences through internships and student media. For more than three decades, *The American Journalist* series has shown that journalists are most influenced by newsroom experiences and co-workers when it comes to ethical issues (Weaver et al., 2007). Wilkins and Coleman (2005) applied the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to professional journalists. Journalists scored quite highly on the DIT, with a p-score of 48.68, just above dental students and below practicing physicians. It's important to note that the p-score for journalists put them near the top of the list, among professions that involve more schooling than a four-year degree. By comparison, the average adult score is 40, undergraduate students come in at 43.2 and graduate students at 44.9 (Wilkins and Coleman, 2005: 39).

Another popular career choice of journalism and mass communication students, however, did not fare so well. Advertising professionals scored a 31.64, just above business school undergraduates and below accounting students (Cunningham, 2005: 119). Similar studies have shown that students with internship or service learning experience may have advanced moral development because of the multiplicity of authority figures they encounter outside the classroom (Borzak, 1981).

Given the accelerated change in how people receive news and other information in the 21st century and the pressure on journalism and mass communication programs to prepare students for a new media landscape, the decline in the number of ethics courses noted in the 2001 survey (Lambeth et al., 2004) may be more than just a lower response rate, it could reflect the pressures on the curriculum to offer more vocational technological courses, forcing hard choices on dedicated and previously required courses in ethics, as well as law and history. For these reasons, as well as other curricular possibilities that are being considered, such as combining media law and ethics, it is important to finally address Clifford Christians' original plea for research into the effectiveness of the pervasive method of ethical instruction.

While the field of ethics involves many important issues and areas to study, the project reported here is narrowly focused on two key concepts in both education and professional media careers: plagiarism and fabrication. Though this focus limits the ability of this project to examine finer gradations in ethical development, such as whether students' conception of justice has expanded in scope or sophistication, the measures analyzed here do provide a baseline of ethical beliefs at the very foundation of media education. In a study of 10 recent top American journalism ethical lapses, plagiarism and fabrication were at the core of each violation (Lasorsa and Dai, 2007). Concerns about plagiarism and fabrication are sources of constant concern both in higher education (Brownlee, 1987; Kroll, 1988; McCabe et al., 2006; Nilsson et al., 2009) and in professional media environments (Lee, 2005; Samson, 2005).

In an attempt to gain insight into how the pervasive method of ethics instruction could influence how students think and feel about plagiarism and fabrication in a professional media environment, the following research questions were posed about students from a broad array of interest areas – print journalism, advertising, public relations, graphic

design, photography, broadcast, and online media – who experienced only a pervasive model of ethical instruction:

RQ1a: As a whole, how concerned are students about media plagiarism and fabrication that occurs in the profession?

RQ1b: What type of penalties would students expect for media professionals found to have engaged in plagiarism or fabrication?

RQ2a: Is there a change in concern about media plagiarism and fabrication from the start to the end of students' educational experience?

RQ2b: Is there a change in penalties that students expect for media plagiarism and fabrication from the start to the end of their educational experience?

RQ3a: Do students with different vocational areas of interest demonstrate increased levels of concern about media plagiarism and fabrication from the start to the end of their educational experience?

RQ3b: Do students with different vocational areas of interest demonstrate increased levels of suggested penalties for media plagiarism and fabrication from the start to the end of their educational experience?

RQ4a: What strategies do journalism and mass communication instructors employ in an introductory media skills course to address ethical issues?

RQ4b: What strategies do journalism and mass communication instructors employ in a capstone media and society seminar to address ethical issues?

## Method

This study emerged from a research project that comprises one of the most exhaustive continuous surveys of students' views on communication ethics ever conducted. Survey data collection began with the spring semester of 2005 and student responses from nine consecutive semesters are considered in this study.<sup>2</sup> The sample of 5060 student responses was drawn from a school of journalism at a major public university in the Midwest. The school is accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) and encompasses all of the vocational areas associated with a mass communication program including advertising, public relations, graphic design, photography, print, broadcast, and online journalism. All of these interest areas were included in data gathering.

Students' responses were gathered as they both entered and exited the program of study, and over time, for the purposes of comparing multi-wave cohorts of responses across two dimensions. Survey questionnaires were distributed at the beginning and end of the semesters of both the introductory reporting course and then again at the beginning and end of the senior capstone course. This approach most closely resembles a cohort analysis (Glenn, 2005) but our cohorts are largely comprised of the same students tracked in multiple waves. Put most simply, we collected data from one school of journalism where students are required to take the introductory course to enter the major. These same students also have to take the capstone course in order to graduate from the program with the major. In other words, we have positioned our survey instrument as a data-gathering device at the start and end of students' program of study through which they

must all pass so that we can specifically track any changes among these students over this time.

In this way, we have created a multi-wave panel dataset, but in keeping with human subjects' regulations, all students filled out the questionnaires without any personally identifying information so it is not statistically possible to construct a perfect panel design. Practically speaking, however, we are intentionally and purposefully tracking the same students' ethical development over time as they progress from entering the program to graduating from it, albeit in panel-aggregated cohort form. While it is true that some students quit the program from the introductory course to the capstone course, and that a very small percentage of others join the major as transfer students, this attrition and addition does not threaten the making of comparisons across cohorts, as we have done here.

Thus, our methodological approach of cohort aggregation based on the work of Deaton (1985: 110) 'can be used to infer behavioral relationships for the cohort as a whole just as if panel data were available'. Practically speaking, though, we are not approximating panel data from random respondents; we have comparative cohorts that are largely comprised of the same individuals from multiple waves of identical data collection. In other words, we compare aggregated pools made up of many (but not perfectly all) of the same students during the times when they are members of a specific cohort. For purposes of analysis here, fixed cohort membership exists at the introductory course and again at the capstone course.

The introductory writing and reporting class averaged 16.4 students per 12 class sections each semester while the senior capstone course included 30.0 students in four sections per semester. The response rate for the introductory class was 95.7 percent and 88.0 percent for the capstone course. To date, the principal investigators of this study have been instructor of record for only three sections of the 136 sections being examined here.

The survey questionnaire includes questions involving plagiarism and fabrication but does not attempt to define the terms, allowing survey responders to utilize their own constructs of the key ethical concepts involved in the study. Through these questionnaires it is possible to measure the extent to which students change their views on plagiarism and fabrication during the course of their college education. To carry out this procedure, factor analyses identified two crucial baseline ethical constructs: student concern for journalistic ethics (Factor 1) and student-suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior (Factor 2). Both factors were additive measures of three questions from the survey that loaded together highly as components with Varimax rotation.

The three separate survey questions that comprised Factor 1 regarding concern for professional ethics asked students how concerned they were when they heard that a journalist had: 1) plagiarized in a story; 2) fabricated material for a story; and 3) made up a source for a story. These items operated on the same four-point ordinal scale that ranged from 'Not at all concerned' to 'Somewhat concerned' to 'Quite concerned' to 'Very concerned.'

Factor 2 encompasses the range of penalties students believe should be given to media professionals guilty of ethical infractions. The responses offered were again on a four-point scale, this time ranging from 'Do nothing' to 'Reprimand in some other way' to 'Move person to another beat/position' to 'Fire the journalist.'<sup>3</sup>



In addition to the survey instrument that was administered to students, instructors from each course were invited to participate in a qualitative survey about how they integrated ethics into these specific classes. The instructor surveys went out to 37 instructors and 25 completed the survey, for a 67.6 percent response rate. The instructor survey included 10 open-ended questions. Once collected, individual responses were examined for the presence of pedagogical similarities and differences, as well as thematic and philosophical consistencies across courses.

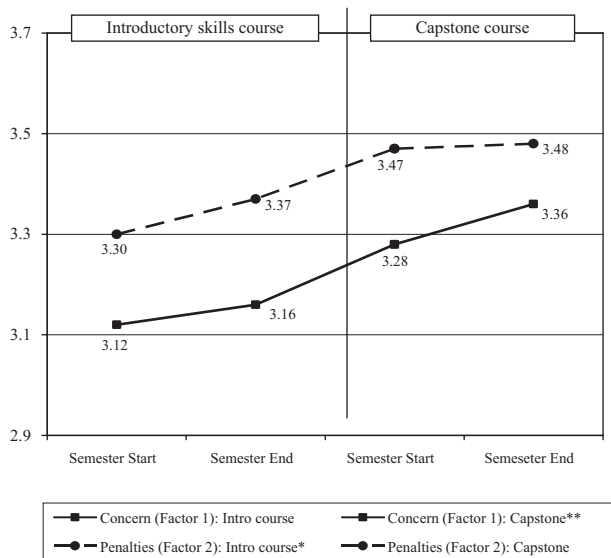
## Results

Concerning RQ1a, students were quite concerned about journalism ethics (identified by Factor 1) with an overall mean level of 3.21 on a four-point scale. This finding is further demonstrated by the 32.5 percent of students who indicated being 'very' concerned about all three dimensions of Factor 1. For RQ1b, the average penalties students suggested for unethical journalistic behavior was a robust 3.38 on a four-point scale. More than half of the students surveyed (50.4%) believed firing was appropriate for any and all of the three ethical infractions denoted by the composite measures of Factor 2. Since these figures represent an average concern level of over 80 percent of the possible variance for each measure, it is reasonably clear that media plagiarism and fabrication and their consequences are of considerable importance to this sample of students.

In addition, it is worthwhile noting the progressively greater levels of concern and suggested penalties students exhibited from the start to end of the semester in the two courses analyzed here. For the introductory course, the change in the average level of concern for professional ethics in Factor 1 (3.12 to 3.16) was not significant ( $t(2983) = 1.23, p > .05$ ), but the increase in student-suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior (Factor 2) was significant in the introductory course, rising from 3.30 to 3.37, ( $t(2983) = 2.35, p < .05$ ), from the start to the end of the semester. Considering the senior capstone course, another statistically significant change emerged ( $t(1884) = 2.54, p \leq .01$ ) as their concern for media ethics increased from 3.28 to 3.36 over the semester. The increase in the suggested penalties, however, during the capstone course (3.47 to 3.48) was not significant ( $t(1884) = 0.18, p > .05$ ).

Altogether, it is clear that students not only enter this program with relatively well-developed attitudes regarding media ethics, but also that their academic training has an observable impact on their conceptions of ethical conduct and its penalties for media professionals. Importantly, since media ethics are taught in this program through a pervasive model where such lessons are part of nearly every course, these findings offer particularly strong evidence that this mode of instruction is effective in both individual courses and over an entire curriculum. These findings are summarized graphically in Figure 1.

While the variations during a single semester had both significant and non-significant increases for the key variables of interest, the overall change from the introductory course through the senior capstone course was strong. Coursework was confirmed as a statistically significant variable for both Factor 1 and Factor 2 when controlling for a host of germane variables, including differences between cohorts, in two separate time fixed-effects regression models. As summarized in Table 1, enrollment in the capstone course



**Figure 1.** Mean levels of concern for journalism ethics and suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior from start to end of semester for introductory skills and capstone courses. Notes: \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$

remained an important predictor in this pervasive method model of ethics instruction, but it is clear that other experiences – many of which were required as part of the program of study throughout the curriculum – also filled an important role in the ethical development of students. Though differences between students can be observed by some areas of interest, age itself was not a positive predictor, which suggests that the moral development observed here is not an artifact of maturation. Altogether, these models contextualize the remaining findings reported here.

Building on these regression models to explain specific differences more fully, research questions 2a and 2b involved the key longitudinal aspects of the study, change during the college experience. Both concern for media ethics (Factor 1) and suggested penalties (Factor 2) showed highly significant increases across cohorts. Concern among all students rose from an overall average of 3.14 in the introductory course to an overall average of 3.32 in the capstone course, ( $t(4869) = 8.23, p < .001$ ) and the overall mean severity of penalties jumped from 3.33 in the introductory course to 3.47 in the graduating-senior-level seminar, ( $t(4869) = 6.51, p < .001$ ).

Since students in journalism and mass communication programs have a wide range of career paths, Research Questions 3a and 3b were designed to investigate any differences in changes in ethical views among students depending on their area of media interests in addition to the regression models where these were considered while controlling for other factors. As evidenced in Table 2, every area of interest showed growth in ethical concern and suggested penalties from the introductory course through the senior capstone class, and, in almost every case, the increase was significant. In regard to concern about media plagiarism and fabrication (RQ3a), the biggest increases came in broadcast (.32), graphic

**Table 1.** Time fixed-effects regression analyses of students' levels of concern (Factor 1) and suggested penalties (Factor 2) for journalistic plagiarism and fabrication

Variables	Factor 1		Factor 2	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	2.727***	0.203	3.457***	0.238
Capstone course	0.123***	0.031	0.129***	0.036
End of semester	0.037#	0.021	non-significant (n.s.)	
Gender (being male)	-0.057*	0.025	n.s.	
Age	-0.017#	0.010	n.s.	
Concern for student cheating	0.371***	0.012	0.100***	0.014
Number of students that cheat	-0.054**	0.020	n.s.	
Pressure justifies unethical behavior	-0.089***	0.017	-0.122***	0.020
Area interest advertising	-0.062*	0.028	-0.066*	0.033
Area interest newspaper	0.120***	0.031	n.s.	
Area interest public relations	n.s.		0.095***	0.030
Student newspaper experience	0.073**	0.026	0.105***	0.030
Student television experience	0.244***	0.070		n.s.
Student campus radio experience	0.107#	0.058		n.s.
Student public radio experience	n.s.		0.279#	0.148
Internship in online	0.192**	0.073	n.s.	
Internship in magazine	n.s.		0.108*	0.051
Internship in newspaper	n.s.		0.080#	0.048
Internship in public relations	n.s.		0.070#	0.038
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.269		0.074	
N	3712		3709	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized. Other areas of interest, student work, and internships were non-significant. 2005 was dropped for multicollinearity. Remaining years were non-significant for Factor 1, but were significant for Factor 2. # $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

design (.22) and newspapers (.20). The only areas where the increases in concern were not significant were photojournalism, online, and 'other'. In the area of suggested penalties for media ethical violations (RQ3b), the largest increases are seen in online (.26), newspapers (.22), graphic design (.19), and advertising (.16). Only photojournalism and 'other' showed non-significant increases. While this analytic approach does not account for the fact that students with certain interest areas already have a higher level of concern and suggested penalties (see Conway and Groshek, 2008, 2009) it does clarify that across the curriculum, students are developing positively with regard to baseline ethical considerations. From a preliminary standpoint at least, this suggests the pervasive method is making a contribution to all students, regardless of their interest area.

Nonetheless, it should be reported that in separate t-tests of mean differences that isolated the effects of the introductory and the capstone courses, only five areas of interest were seen to have any statistically significant increase in either Factor 1 or Factor 2 from the start to end of the semester. Thus, focusing on individual career areas, the

**Table 2.** Mean levels of concern for journalism ethics and suggested penalties for unethical journalistic behavior across different interest areas from start to end of college education

Interest areas	Factors of concern for journalism ethics and suggested penalties	Introductory course mean	Capstone course mean	Difference in means from introductory to capstone course
All students ( <i>n</i> = 4871)	Factor 1: Concern	3.14	3.32	+0.18*** <i>t</i> (4869) = 8.23)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.33	3.47	+0.14*** <i>t</i> (4869) = 6.51)
Advertising <i>n</i> = 1048)	Factor 1: Concern	2.98	3.16	+0.18*** <i>t</i> (1046) = 3.80)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.24	3.40	+0.16*** <i>t</i> (1046) = 3.25)
Public Relations ( <i>n</i> = 1654)	Factor 1: Concern	3.07	3.20	+0.13*** <i>t</i> (1652) = 3.32)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.27	3.38	+0.11** <i>t</i> (1652) = 2.67)
Graphic Design ( <i>n</i> = 250)	Factor 1: Concern	3.14	3.36	+0.22* <i>t</i> (248) = 2.52)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.33	3.52	+0.19* <i>t</i> (248) = 1.94)
Other ( <i>n</i> = 594)	Factor 1: Concern	3.15	3.22	+0.07 <i>t</i> (592) = 1.18)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.43	3.52	+0.09 <i>t</i> (592) = 1.46)
Broadcast ( <i>n</i> = 786)	Factor 1: Concern	3.13	3.45	+0.32*** <i>t</i> (784) = 6.02)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.32	3.46	+0.14** <i>t</i> (784) = 2.53)
Magazine ( <i>n</i> = 1554)	Factor 1: Concern	3.21	3.40	+0.19*** <i>t</i> (1552) = 4.78)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.36	3.51	+0.15*** <i>t</i> (1552) = 3.66)
Newspaper ( <i>n</i> = 923)	Factor 1: Concern	3.37	3.57	+0.20*** <i>t</i> (921) = 4.38)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.47	3.69	+0.22*** <i>t</i> (921) = 4.69)
Photojournalism ( <i>n</i> = 433)	Factor 1: Concern	3.25	3.31	+0.06 <i>t</i> (431) = 0.76)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.34	3.42	+0.08 <i>t</i> (431) = 1.01)
Online ( <i>n</i> = 196)	Factor 1: Concern	3.28	3.41	+0.13 <i>t</i> (194) = 1.23)
	Factor 2: Penalties	3.34	3.60	+0.26* <i>t</i> (194) = 2.39)

Note: Students could select more than one area of interest; listwise deletion. \*\*\**p* ≤ .001, \*\**p* ≤ .01, \**p* ≤ .05

increases appear to be more of a cumulative effect that is happening during the college experience, due at least in part to the ethics instruction that is incorporated throughout the curriculum.

To examine this further, this study was specifically designed with a mixed methodological approach in an attempt to dig deeper in certain pedagogical areas of the college experience. In addition to the student surveys, instructors of the two courses were invited to answer open-ended questions about their approach to teaching ethics in the classroom. Research questions 4a and 4b thus delve into the instructors' methods of ethical instruction.

Concerning the introductory reporting, writing and editing course (RQ4a), 14 of 17 instructors indicated they spend anywhere from 5 to 15 percent of class time teaching ethics. Only one instructor suggested a rate greater than this (30 percent), and three mentioned 'weaving' ethics issues in the class. In addition, only one of the instructors was using an ethics textbook. All of the instructors in the introductory course reported regularly using real-world examples of high profile cases of plagiarism and fabrication, including Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, and Jack Kelley, in the classroom. Many also had years of professional media experience, and more than 60 percent (11 of 17) occasionally relied on their own careers to provide relevant examples. Just over half of the instructors

(9 of 17) reported spending class time on ethical considerations in vocational areas outside of traditional journalism (including public relations and advertising).

Understanding the different pedagogical goals involved in the senior capstone course (RQ4b) is important because that class often reflects the interests of the individual instructor. The class is officially called 'The Media as Social Institutions', but some instructors have chosen to devote much of the semester to ethical instruction, leading some students to refer to it as their 'ethics class' (Brownlee, 1987). In the survey of instructors reported here, half of the eight respondents reported spending more than 80 percent of class time on ethics. Three indicated ethics instruction took up 50 to 80 percent of the course, while only one instructor noted using less than half the class (25 percent) on media ethics issues.

All but one instructor of the capstone course used an ethics textbook, the most popular being *Media Ethics* by Patterson and Wilkins (2011). The instructors also noted using articles from online sources and newspapers, including ethical violations from the professional media world 'all the time' or 'every class period'. All of the instructors had extensive professional media experience, but the general consensus among them was to keep their own experiences out of classroom unless particularly relevant – and a number mentioned that their personal experiences were too old to be relevant. All but one of these instructors handled specific vocational areas of interest with special attention and brought in different angles for public relations and advertising, as well as other areas in media and journalism. The one instructor that did not include such units noted an intention to pay more attention to 'this good point next time'.

As a general philosophical framework, most of the instructors in the senior capstone class agreed that constructive class discussions based on readings and case studies were most effective in ethics instruction. The impact of taking this course seemed a bit greater in terms of plagiarism and fabrication than did taking the introductory skills course; however, there is good reason to believe that this course added rigor to an already established foundation that was further constructed through the pervasive method in other courses beyond the two sampled here. One indicator of this is the increases from the end of the introductory semester to the start of the capstone semester in Figure 1. In other words, even when ethical instruction was not uniformly applied across courses, the net effect of the pervasive method of ethical instruction appears complementary and successful.

## Conclusions

This study has finally addressed Christians' (1978) call more than 30 years ago for research in the pervasive method as a model of ethics instruction in journalism and mass communication. In the specific areas of media plagiarism and fabrication, students are quite concerned (3.21 out of 4.00) and expect harsh penalties (3.38 out of 4.00) for those journalists who are guilty of ethical violations. In a longitudinal view that looks at entering and graduating cohorts through the college experience, students become significantly more concerned about professional ethics (3.12 to 3.36) and expect significantly harsher penalties (3.30 to 3.48) for plagiarism and fabrication at the end of their college program when compared to their first course in the major.

Focusing on the semester-long experiences in two classes, the introductory reporting, writing and editing course resulted in significant increases in the level of penalties students expected for professionals who plagiarize or fabricate. In the senior capstone course, students become significantly more concerned about media plagiarism and fabrication during the 15-week course. These key results and several others were confirmed through a time fixed-effects regression model that considered a host of germane demographic and psychographic measures.

Separating into vocational interest areas (Table 2), students in all areas showed an increase in concern about professional ethics during their college years, and almost all of the increases were significant, with broadcast, newspaper, and graphic design showing the largest gains. Only online, photojournalism, and 'other' had non-significant increases. The severity of suggested penalties also increased for all vocational areas from freshmen to senior years. Largest increases in penalties were found in students interested in online, newspapers, and graphic design. The only non-significant increases happened in photojournalism and 'other'.

Overall, students in this journalism and mass communication program utilizing a pervasive method of ethical instruction consider media plagiarism and fabrication serious ethical violations, and their views become significantly stronger through their college experience, no matter their vocational interests. In some cases, the increase in concern or suggested penalties is even significant over the course of a single semester. It is worth reiterating here that these findings do not necessarily explicate Kohlbergian moral growth in terms of an increased ability to more carefully weigh conflicting values as related to gray or ethically fuzzy media practices; however, in aggregated analyses of baseline ethical issues regarding plagiarism and fabrication, there is strong evidence of meaningful and positive ethical development.

The survey of instructors revealed a conscious effort to weave ethical issues within the coursework in both the introductory and the senior capstone classes. The instructors favored using case studies and professional ethical examples and generating classroom discussions. While most of the instructors have extensive media experience, they are reluctant to rely on their own experiences and instead use more timely examples. The senior capstone course has a stronger ethical component, with almost all instructors using an ethics textbook. This attention to ethical issues, plus the reputation of the course as an 'ethics class', could help account for the significant increase in student concern shown over the course of that semester.

Though the results of this study document the utility of the pervasive method in ethics instruction, it is not the position of this research to argue that the pervasive method is the best method. Nor is it our contention that the dedicated ethics model is inferior; indeed, our results do not provide the basis for such comparisons. The evidence presented here indicates that despite decades of being understudied and underdeveloped, the pervasive model may be an effective means of ethics instruction, particularly at the level of fundamental issues in media ethics, and deserves closer attention.

Given the decades of research into moral development, this study certainly does not indicate the pervasive model is primarily or singularly responsible for the increase in concern in the students' concerns and expected penalties in media ethics. As we have here, countless studies show students in college tend to advance in moral development,

but enrollment in the capstone remains a statistically significant predictor when controlling for many other factors, including time and age. As such, we have moved beyond Jacob's (1957) jaundiced mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century view that the type of school or instructor has little bearing on moral development, but the coursework is still just one part of the college experience (see also Conway and Groshek, 2008, 2009).

Concerning the study reported here, previous research can provide insight into what else might be responsible for the significant increases in ethical views. Students in liberal arts schools or programs tend to see more advancement in moral development (McNeel, 1994; Rest, 1994b). The school involved in this study started in a college of arts and sciences and retains a strong liberal arts foundation, which is also a requirement of ACEJMC accredited programs. In addition, with the high Defining Issues Test (DIT) scores of professional journalists (Wilkins and Coleman, 2005) and the importance of newsroom learning for ethical issues (Weaver et al., 2007), students are hearing a strong message against plagiarism and fabrication in the classroom, but also on internships and in student media (Borzak, 1981). As a result of these processes within a pervasive model of ethics instruction, students in this school of journalism demonstrate a significantly higher level of concern and expect significantly harsher penalties for professional ethical violations.

A caveat involved in this survey research, and much of the moral development work, is that this study is measuring intention, not action (Mischel and Mischel, 1976). The results indicate the level of students' concern and suggested penalties, not how they would actually handle a case of media plagiarism and fabrication. Likewise, the results here cannot indicate with certainty how these students would react in ethical situations beyond plagiarism and fabrication, or the sophistication of their ethical deliberative abilities in such instances. Nonetheless, this study provides a long overdue assessment of the pervasive method that returned overwhelmingly positive cross-curricular results on two fundamental ethical issues that every student and program of instruction must consider. As such, it represents an opportunity for ethics scholars and educational units to reconsider the benefits and drawbacks of this approach as a viable alternative to the dedicated ethics course model. Though there are many factors that certainly mold the ethical development of students, evidence from this study has shown that pedagogical practices are a critical consideration that can complement and structure that development throughout students' training for careers in journalism and mass communication.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank the Indiana University School of Journalism for its generous, multi-year support of this ambitious ethics research project.

### **Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### **Notes**

- 1 The results are a bit confusing because the authors report 152 for both the number of ethics courses and number of programs offering an ethics course. In previous studies, the number of ethics courses had always been higher than the number of schools offering an ethics course

- since some programs offered more than course.
- 2 All surveys have been filled out voluntarily, anonymously, without any form of reward or compensation. Following guidelines specifically approved by the university's Human Research Protection Program for this project, researchers and course instructors were not present when students were given and completed the questionnaires. Data collection with the techniques used in this study continued through May 2011, at which point the survey was adapted online.
  - 3 Factor 1 demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability score of 0.91 and the reliability of the scale for factor 2 was  $\alpha = 0.79$ .

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## Biographical notes

Jacob Groshek (PhD, Indiana University) is a Lecturer at the University of Melbourne, Australia. His research focuses on communication technologies in shaping political change but also includes

applied econometric analyses and media ethics. Recent publications appear in *Journal of Communication* and *International Journal of Communication*, among others.

**Mike Conway** (MA, PhD, University of Texas at Austin) is an Associate Professor in the School of Journalism at Indiana University. He is the author of *The Origins of Television News in America: The Visualizers of CBS in the 1940s* (Peter Lang, 2009) as well as numerous journal articles relating to journalism history, broadcast news content, and research methodology.