

ISSU9JO - Royals and Rascals: Contemporary Studies in British Journalism

Module description

For centuries, Britain's kings and queens have had a powerful impact on society and on its institutions. Following the rise of celebrity culture, members of the British Royal family and other public figures have used their influence and financial muscle to push back journalists in order to reclaim their privacy. This module is aimed at journalism students and others interested in the media and its relationship with public figures, including Britain's royals, who want to explore fundamental ethical principles and press freedom issues from the vantage point of some of the world's most fascinating news stories. These cases range from Princess Diana's death, for which the Paparazzi were blamed, to Prince Harry's more recent indiscretions, which played out in the digital media.

Module outline

As technology ushers in a new era for the global media industry, news outlets in the UK are battling additional challenges in the fight for commercial survival. Following the rise of celebrity culture, members of the British Royal family and other public figures have used their influence and financial muscle to push back journalists in order to reclaim their privacy.

This module is aimed at journalism students and others interested in the media and its relationship with public figures who want to explore fundamental ethical principles from the vantage point of some of the world's most fascinating news stories. Students will be given the opportunity to examine the key cases that have led to political moves to curtail freedom of speech and press freedom in a country that was once at the vanguard of democratic development. These cases range from Princess Diana's death, for which the Paparazzi were blamed, to Prince Harry's more recent indiscretions, which played out in the digital media.

Learning outcomes

The module will help develop written and oral communication skills through written coursework and tutorial participation. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- * better evaluate news stories in order to balance human rights and ethical principles with profitability imperatives;
- * identify and compare and contrast ethical codes in place in newsrooms in the UK, US and elsewhere;
- * identify major differences and similarities between editorial decision-making about public figures in the UK, the US and other major markets; and
- * make and defend arguments for or against publication in a simulated newsroom environment as preparation for a career in the mainstream media or a related field.

Proposed teaching schedule

One-hour lecture; two-hour interactive seminars.

Week one

- * Introduction: From the fairy tale weddings to Camilla-gate and Fergie's toe-sucking snaps - the rise of the Tabloids and their relationship with the Royals.
- * Seminars: Case studies. The broad ethical principles.

*** Week two**

- * The next generation: Harry, Wills and the rules of engagement for the media.
- * Seminars: Case studies. Public interest.

*** Week three**

- * British media in crisis: Events leading up to the Levinson Inquiry, moves to regulate the British media – and current state of play. What recent developments mean for journalists in the UK and elsewhere who are reporting on the Royal media (legal, commercial aspects in a globalised media environment).
- * Seminars: Codes of ethics.

*** Week four**

- * Comparative media studies: The British media versus the International media. Risks and opportunities in reporting on British Royalty. Social media and reporting on the Royals: risks, opportunities.
- * Seminars: Debates (group presentations).

Assessment: The assessment is based on one essay of 1200-1500 words , or a media-style report based on one of the field trips (worth 50%), one multiple-choice class test (worth 30%) and one group presentation (worth 20%, with 10% of the mark allocated on individual contribution towards the group effort). The essay will be based on a case covered in the module and the group presentation will be oriented towards arguing in favour – or against – publication of a case, with students expected to draw on theoretical and practical insights gained during the module.

Suggested field trips: Balmoral Castle and a visit to a Scottish newsroom (eg. BBC). Details to be finalised.