Updating the codes of ethics

The Society of Professional Journalism's three main principles have historically been truth, independence and accountability. These ethical principles, which were informed by the Poynter Institute, were in the summer of 2013 updated to truth, transparency and community in a new Poynter book, *"The New Ethics of Journalism: Essays for the 21st Century."*

This transition represents the shift to the digital age. Transparency is needed to maintain credibility. Journalists may still make independent decisions and have affiliations as long as they are disclosed. Community has always been important in journalism, but it's even more relevant now the community can have a voice in the news process.

Discussion questions at three levels:

Flashlight: How should the SPJ code implement these new principles? Take transparency: What does that mean when it comes to anonymous sourcing and anonymous comments? Could a news organization look at these two differently? Are there circumstances in which you might allow each of them, and if so, what would those circumstances be?

Spotlight: Why were independence and accountability no longer thought to be organizing principles? Do the new themes, transparency and community, simply say the same thing in different ways? Does the existence of the new emphasis threaten those values?

Searchlight: Ethics are only as good as the people who wish to follow them. Soon after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, CNN rushed to wrongly report a suspect had been arrested. Major news outlets followed. But it wasn't true. CNN withdrew the report. A suspect wasn't arrested for days. Consider this story on CNN's new procedures. Discussion questions: What might have stopped the error? What did CNN do well in this case? What do you hope the new system of 'check-and-balances' includes?

Extra credit: Bonus credit to any student who explores the codes of ethics from national journalism organizations such as the Society for Professional Journalists, the Radio Television Digital News Association, the Associated Collegiate Press

and the National Scholastic Press Association. The assignment, in writing, is to answer these questions: Do they all seem up to date with digital age issues? If not, which need freshening? How?