JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding, Classes Nos. 15256 & 15257

Fall semester 2020, University of Florida
100 percent online

Description:

Students will learn sleuthing methods to gather and analyze public records and publicly accessible records. They will learn to understand the importance of records for uncovering information about public figures including politicians, athletes, celebrities and other newsworthy people, organizations and businesses, and for identifying prospective information sources and verifying what people say about themselves. They will discover what kinds of records are generally available in Florida and beyond, and learn strategies for finding and obtaining them for free or reduced costs. They will gain practical experience finding records and using them to generate lines of inquiry. Although designed for journalists, the course will be useful for anyone who needs better, faster access to reliable information. Due to the pandemic, the class meets remotely. Some of our class sessions will be synchronous (interactive) and feature live guest speakers, but most class sessions will be asynchronous. Your grade will be based on your homework, participation in a weekly online discussion platform and graded quizzes and tests. **There is no final exam. You will be done with this course after UF's last regular day of fall classes, on Dec. 9.**

Attendance:

Students can learn the material only by watching the online course lectures. You also are responsible for arranging to complete any missed quizzes, assignments or other graded work within one week of your return to class. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at
https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx

Office hours:

Drop-in office hours will be 10a to 2p Thursdays via Zoom. You can connect with me during that time using this link:

> https://ufl.zoom.us/j/98254086386?pwd=ZUZBMVhGWi9uOER1TFRZc2NYUkhzQT09

> *Meeting ID: 982 5408 6386*
> *Passcode: 241155*

Please make an appointment in advance, whenever possible, to avoid the virtual waiting room. I am also generally available by appointment on other days. My email is tbridis@ufl.edu. I generally respond within 24 hours to emails during weekdays or within 48 hours during weekends.

Your teaching assistants are undergraduate seniors Melissa Hernandez hernandezmelissa@ufl.edu and Everitt Rosen everosen@ufl.edu, who both did very well learning these same materials in this same course. Please feel free to contact them with questions.

Homework:

The instructor will make occasional assignments related to lectures and course work that students will submit in Canvas.

Grading:

Four quizzes will be based on the lecture material only and will be a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions. Each quiz is worth 100 points. There are five assignments, worth 30 points each. There will be three graded tests, worth 150 points each. A participation grade worth up to 150 points will be awarded for weekly postings to the online Packback platform (see "Textbooks"). There may be occasional, optional extra-credit assignments.

Grading	Points
4 quizzes @ 100 each	400
5 assignments @ 30 each	150
Participation posts	150
3 tests @ 150 each	450

Grading scale:

A = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 75-79
C = 70-74
C- = 67-69
D+ = 63-66
D = 60-63
D- = 55-59
F = 54 or below

NOTE: The journalism school requires a minimum grade of a C in this course. If you end the semester with fewer than 70 percent, you may have to retake it.

Class requirements:

Most of our class-wide communication, including updates to this syllabus, will arrive via Canvas. **Please install the Canvas app on your smart phone and enable notifications**, and please regularly log in using your laptop. Please keep in touch with me or your teaching assistants regularly if you have any questions.

Our class sessions may be audio and visually recorded for students in the class to refer back and for enrolled students who are unable to attend live. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a

profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.

When participating in our synchronous classroom sessions over Zoom, you should:

- Dress appropriately as you would in a regular class. I **prefer** but do not require that you leave your video turned on so that our guest speakers and I can see you.
- Use headphones if in a room with ambient noise.
- Situate your computer in an appropriate setting for displaying your video image to the participants of the Zoom meeting.
- Sit on a chair (preferably by a desk) or on a couch with no one behind you, if possible.
- Keep your audio on mute unless you are responding to the participants of the Zoom meeting.
- Use your computer, phone, or tablet only for reading course content and for taking notes.
- Do not use your electronic devices to take or receive calls, text messages, or view material unrelated to the course during the Zoom meeting.
- Use Zoom's chat feature to direct your questions to the whole class rather than a private chat with another student.
- Always be respectful of the ideas of others; if you disagree with the opinion or view of a classmate, express your own comments in a way that is respectful.
- Be open-minded.

Grading policies:

https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/

A word about diversity:

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

I want to create a learning environment for students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) To help accomplish this:

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know.
- If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please do not hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

- If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, Joanna Hernandez, CJC director of inclusion and diversity, is an excellent resource. You can email her at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.
- If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

Accommodating students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Textbooks:

Students will be required to purchase a $25/semester access to Packback, an online discussion and participation platform. **Look for an email invitation to your UFL address with instructions to join the correct community.** On Packback, students will ask complex questions and interact with classmates about how our studies relate to the real world. As it relates to this specific course, my goals for using Packback are to ensure students comprehend material from lectures and assignments and discuss more broadly techniques and implications about information-gathering.

The optional textbook is, "The Manual to Online Public Records: The Researcher's Tool to Online Resources of Public Records and Public Information," by Michael L Sankey and Cynthia Hetherington. JOU students will also find it useful to own a copy of "The Associated Press Guide to News Writing: The Resource for Professional Journalists," by Rene J. Cappon.

Course evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/.

Honesty policy:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: 'On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.' The Honor Code (https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx, 352-392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 911 for emergencies.

Week of Aug. 31 – Week One

    Fact Finding introduction

    Overview of the class, grading, office hours, textbook, expectations

    Discussion of human sources vs records; producing reliable, distinctive journalism

    How & when do modern newsrooms assign reporters to background individuals, organizations (breaking news vs in-depth reporting or vetting)

    Case studies for in-class discussion

    When "fact finding" goes wrong

    No homework this week

    No Packback posts due this week

Week of Sept. 7 – Week Two

    Law enforcement

    Homework assignment due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

    Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Sept. 14 – Week Three

    Guest speaker: Please attend live Zoom session 3 p.m. Monday, Sept. 14

    Homework assignment due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

    Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Sept. 21 – Week Four

    Courts & the criminal justice system

    LexisNexis Public Records data service review, demonstration

    PACER service review, demonstration

    Fastcase service review, demonstration

    Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

    Quiz No. 1

Week of Sept. 28 – Week Five

    Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a mock reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Oct. 5 – Week Six

Investigating politicians: scandals, financial disclosures, tax returns, bankruptcy records, property records

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Homework assignment due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Oct. 12 – Week Seven

Investigating politicians: scandals, financial disclosures, tax returns, bankruptcy records, property records (Part Two)

Quiz No. 2

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Oct. 19 – Week Eight

Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a mock reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Oct. 26 – Week Nine

U.S. Freedom of Information Act

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Homework assignment due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Nov. 2 – Week 10

U.S. Freedom of Information Act (cont'd)

State public records law, including Florida's Public Records Law

Quiz No. 3

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Nov. 9 – Week 11

Influence game: Political contributions, dark money, domestic & foreign lobbying, regulatory process

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Nov. 16 – Week 12

Investigating businesses: SEC filings, LLC registrations, federal & state tax enforcement, regulatory and license enforcement, patents & trademarks, press releases; state and federal government business contracts

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Homework assignment due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Nov. 23 – Week 13

Thanksgiving break

No Packback posts due this week

Week of Nov. 30 – Week 14

Review for final test

Quiz No. 4

Packback posts due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of Dec. 7 – Week 15

Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a mock reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

No Packback posts due this week

About your instructor:

Ted Bridis ("BRY-dis") was editor of the Pulitzer-winning investigative team for The Associated Press in Washington for 11 years before coming to the University of Florida. He is a founding editor of Fresh Take Florida, a news service covering state government by UF student reporters. He is also administrator of the new $25,000 Collier Prize for State Government Accountability awarded each spring at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner in Washington. In addition to teaching, he works as a consulting editor with journalists internationally for Freelance Investigative Reporters and Editors, a project of Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc. Bridis was the first journalist to identify Hillary Clinton's personal email server and trace it to her home's basement. His team of AP reporters also was the first to reveal the illegal foreign lobbying activities of Donald Trump's presidential campaign chairman, who was subsequently fired, indicted and imprisoned. He was AP's editor on the series on child-immigrant detentions that was a finalist for the 2019 Pulitzer. His team won the 2018 AP Media Editors deadline reporting award for coverage of Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath, and was a finalist for the 2017 IRE award for investigations triggered by breaking news. Bridis led efforts that won the $10,000 Eugene S. Pulliam First Amendment Awards in 2014 and 2011, and he won the 2014 Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics and 2014 SPJ Ethics in Journalism Award. His team won the Pulitzer & Goldsmith prizes for investigative reporting in 2012 on NYPD intelligence programs. He is one of six AP journalists whose phone records the Justice Department seized in 2013 as part of a criminal leaks case involving a major terrorism investigation, which led to stronger press protections under new federal regulations. He was one of AP's seven analysts since 2004 responsible for calling winners in national elections, and his call in 2016 allowed AP to be the first new organization to project Donald Trump winning the presidency. Bridis

previously covered technology, hackers, national security and the Justice Department for the AP in Washington, where he has worked since 1998. He spent two years at the Wall Street Journal, where he covered technology policy and computer and national security. He witnessed Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon and was first to report it to his editors; the Journal subsequently won the 2002 Pulitzer for Breaking News Reporting for its 9/11 coverage. He returned to AP to head coverage of the 9/11 terrorism investigations. He has a journalism degree from the University of Missouri.