

## JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding, Class Nos. 17898 & 18554

“Summer A” semester 2021, University of Florida  
100 percent online, asynchronous course delivery

### 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 and others. 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. Our class meets remotely via asynchronous sessions. 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 classes for the semester.**

### Attendance:

Students can learn the material only by watching the online course lectures. You 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:

Since the course is taught online, I will be available by appointment via Zoom or phone during weekdays.

We will use this link:

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/98062186481?pwd=KzlTVWJwNGpOQ1R5dUs5K1hSVHJqZz09>

*Meeting ID: 980 6218 6481*

*Passcode: 644531*

My email is [tbridis@ufl.edu](mailto:tbridis@ufl.edu). I generally respond within 24 hours to emails during weekdays or within 48 hours during weekends.

### Homework:

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

### Grading:

Five quizzes will be based on the lecture material and demonstrated ability to use the resources in our weekly lessons to research real-world issues. Each quiz is worth at least 200 points. There are five assignments, worth 30 points each. A participation grade worth up to 200 points will be awarded for

weekly writing prompts to the online Packback platform (see “Textbooks”). There may be optional extra-credit assignments made available at the instructor’s discretion.

Grading	Points
5 quizzes @ 200 each	1,000
5 assignments @ 30 each	150
Weekly writing prompts	200

Grading scale:

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69
- 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 regularly if you have any questions.

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](mailto: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/](http://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 \$35/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.

#### 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:

It is a violation of UF policy and my copyright to share without authorization any course materials I have produced for this class, including quizzes and tests. This includes informal sharing through social networks or uploading such course materials to a variety of online services that purport to serve as academic assistance sites. When this happens, I will make every effort under the U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act and other mechanisms to promptly remove the material and identify who shared it, to facilitate filing a formal complaint with the Dean of Students and employing other sanctions that I reserve.

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.

Weekly schedule (subject to adjustments, which I will announce):

Week of May 10 – 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

Homework No. 1: Introduce yourself

Week of May 17 – Week Two

Cops & courts lesson

LexisNexis Public Records data service review, demonstration

PACER service review, demonstration

Fastcase service review, demonstration

Homework assignment No. 2 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

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

Quiz No. 1 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of May 24 – Week Three

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

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

Homework Assignment No. 3 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Quiz No. 2 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of May 31 – Week Four

U.S. Freedom of Information Act

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

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

Homework assignment No. 4 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Quiz No. 3 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of June 7 – Week Five

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

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

Homework assignment No. 5 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Quiz No. 4 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

Week of June 14 – Week Six

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

Quiz No. 5 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday

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, imprisoned and pardoned by Trump. 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 Trump winning the presidency. Bridis previously covered technology, hackers, national security and the Justice Department for the AP in Washington, where he had 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.