

SYLLABUS
APPLIED FACT FINDING
JOU 3110/SECTION 0863
SUMMER A 2016
TUESDAYS, WEDNESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, PERIODS 4-5
12:30-3:15 P.M.
MATHERLY HALL ROOM 51

Instructor: Rich Shumate, M.A.

Email: shumater@ufl.edu

Twitter: @The_Shumater

Office: Weimer Hall G034

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. to Noon, or by appointment

Prerequisite: JOU 3109c Multimedia Writing and JM Designation

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to teach students how to use a wide variety of public records, reference materials and Internet resources to gather information as a reporter. Students will also learn how to analyze, interpret, present and apply such data. This course combines lecture and discussion with hands-on training to build student skills. Topics that will be covered include:

- Florida's Sunshine and Public Records laws and the federal Freedom of Information Act
- Strategies for effectively using public records and publicly available information.
- Public records resources available in Florida and at the federal level.
- Using search engines and social networks to gather information.
- Public records available in essential offices, including the Secretary of State and Circuit Court clerks.
- How to use public records to cover courts and the government, education, environment and business beats.
- Using Excel spreadsheets to report and present data.
- Ethical considerations involved in using public records.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to effectively access, search and interpret public records for use as a journalism tool.

- Understand how important public records are for working journalists and how they are used.
- Use information from public records to develop story ideas and report and write a news story.
- Complete requests under the Florida Public Records Law and the federal Freedom of Information Act.
- Analyze basic datasets in Excel and present information graphically.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- No textbooks are required for this course. Assigned readings will be posted on the Course Reserves section of the Canvas shell.
- Students are required to have a laptop or tablet with internet access to complete in-class assignments. Please bring your laptop or tablet with you to each class session

ATTENDANCE

This class is a laboratory-style course where you will work on assignments and perform public records searches in class. We will also cover a large amount of material very quickly over the six-week term. Therefore, it is imperative that students attend all class sessions. Deductions will be made from the attendance portion of the grade for all absences, except those for university-approved activities or those approved by the instructor in advance of the absence. Students will also not be allowed to make up missed in-class assignments. If circumstances require you to miss a class, please talk to the instructor ASAP.

GRADING

- A: 90-100
- B+: 87-89
- B: 80-86
- C+: 77-79
- C: 70-76
- D+: 67-69
- D: 60-55
- E: Below 60

GRADING BREAKDOWN

- **10% Attendance/Participation:** A sign-in seat will be circulated at the end of every class. (Note: Students who have more than three unexcused absences will lose the entire 10% participation grade.)
- **20% Assignments/Quizzes:** There will be one quiz and 11 assignments. Students only have to complete nine of the 11 assignments; the lowest two scores won't be counted.
- **10% News Story Treatment:** Students will come up with a story idea using public records and identify what records they would use to report the story and how they would use them. Students won't have to write the story.
- **15% News Story:** Students will develop an idea for a news story that uses public records and will then report and write the story. (Note: News stories will be graded using the deduction system for AP Style/punctuation/grammar used in Multimedia Writing and Reporting, including -50 for fact errors.)
- **5% Public Records Requests:** Students will write letters making state and federal public records requests.
- **5% Excel Project:** Students will use Excel to analyze a database and create Excel graphics. This grade includes completion of the Excel course on Lynda.com.
- **15% Final Exam:** A study guide will be provided.
- **20% Final Project:** Students will be put in teams of three to conduct a thorough analysis of residents of a particular address, using only public records or publicly available information. The grade on the group project will be based 90% on the actual project grade and 10% on the group's evaluations of each other's work.

LATE WORK

Work must be turned in on the due date. Late work will be penalized 10 points and will become a zero if it is turned in more than one week late.

GROUP WORK

This course includes work in groups, including the final project. All group members are responsible for the content within the final project. If problems arise, group members are encouraged to work out differences among themselves before alerting the instructor.

Group members will evaluate each other at the end of the project, which will count 10 percent of the final project grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to abide by the University of Florida's rules for academic integrity, including the Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcode.php>). Making up sources or quotes in a news story is a violation, as is plagiarism. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand plagiarism. You can read about issues related to academic dishonesty in the College of Journalism and Communications at <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/honesty>

Academic dishonesty will result in a zero on the assignment and could lead to failure in the course. The instructor is required to report any violations of the Honor Code to the Dean of Students Office, in accordance with University of Florida policy.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All students with disabilities will be accommodated, after the instructor receives a letter from the Disability Resource Center. Please contact the DRC if you need an accommodation; the DRC will then generate a letter for the instructor so that the accommodation can be made.

CELL PHONES

Please turn off or silence cell phones at the start of class. Please refrain using from cell phones during class, as it is distracting to the other students and the instructor.

FOOD/DRINK

Drinks are allowed, but please don't bring food to class, i.e. each lunch before you arrive.

CHANGES TO SYLLABUS

The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises.

CLASS SCHEDULE

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| <p>May 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Class • The Power of Public Records • Assignment 1 | <p>May 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment 1 Due /Discussion • Florida Sunshine Law • Florida Public Records Law • Federal FOIA • <u>Public Records Request Assignment</u> | <p>May 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with Denials • Using Library Resources to Report (Guest Speaker: April Hines, UF Libraries) • Assignment 2 (in class) • Public Records Thinking |
| <p>May 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Sunshine Law/FOIA Quiz</u> • Florida Public Records Resources (Ch.6 in Manual of Online Public Records) • Assignment 3 (in class) | <p>May 18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Study: Innocents Lost (Guest Speaker: Carol Marbin Miller, <i>Miami Herald</i>) • Search Engines (Ch. 2 in Manual of Online Public Records) • <u>News Story Treatment Assignment</u> | <p>May 19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Public Records Request Assignment DUE</u> • Search Engines (cont.) • Assignment 4 (in class) |
| <p>May 24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering the Environment with Public Records (Guest Speaker: Cynthia Burnett, UF Faculty) • Social Networks (Ch. 3 in Manual of Online Public Records) | <p>May 25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Stalking (Guest Speaker: Andrea Hall, UF Ph.D. Student) • Social Networks (cont.) • My Florida.com • Assignment 5 (in class) • <u>Final Project Teams Assigned</u> | <p>May 26</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>News Story Treatment DUE</u> • Sunbiz.org • Essential Office: County Clerk • MyFloridaCounty.com • Assignment 6 (in class) |

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| <p>May 31</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Public Records to Cover Courts (Guest Speaker: Spencer Mann, former PIO for Alachua County State's Attorney) Essential Office: Secretary of State Assignment 7 (in class) <u>News Story Assignment</u> | <p>June 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using Excel to Report and Present News Introduction to Lynda.com Assignment 8 | <p>June 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freedom of Information and Covering Student Government (Guest Speaker TBA) Secretary of State (cont.) Assignment 9 <u>Excel Project Assignment</u> |
| <p>June 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment 8 and 9 Due Covering Government with Public Records (Guest Speaker, Arek Sarkissian, Gainesville Sun) Reading Bills and Ordinances | <p>June 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering Education with Public Records Assignment 10 (in class) Ethical Considerations in Using Public Records | <p>June 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>News Story Due</u> Covering Business with Public Records Cross-Checking Assignment 11 (in class) |
| <p>June 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Excel Project Due</u> <u>Lynda.com Due</u> Case Study: Mental Hospitals and the Public Records Law (Guest Speaker: Lenora LaPeter, <i>Tampa Bay Times</i>) | <p>June 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Final Exam</u> | <p>June 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Final Project Due</u> (Turn in 2-4 p.m. at my office, G034 Weimer) |