

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding

Fall semester 2016, University of Florida

Instructor

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OBJECTIVE

Students will learn methods for gathering and analyzing public records used by practicing journalists. They walk away with an understanding of the importance of public records for backgrounding people and businesses and for uncovering information that can't be found by interviewing people. Students also will leave the course knowing the kinds of records that are critical to traditional news beats. They will get practical experience uncovering those records and using them to generate story ideas. And they will learn how to anticipate when and where records might be available.

During the course, students will apply this knowledge in group exercises and in several short quizzes.

Grades largely will be determined by your performance on a series of quizzes and by student participation in class exercises and discussion.

ATTENDANCE AND RULES OF THE ROAD

Class attendance is mandatory and will be taken regularly throughout the course. Students with more than one unexcused absence may lose all points available for class participation.

Additional absences will result in further penalties at the sole discretion of the instructors.

Absences approved by the instructor in advance, or those due to extreme circumstances, such as illness, may be forgiven at the discretion of the instructors.

Discussions in class may include information about stories in progress. Students will be asked at the beginning of the course to agree to **keep all class conversations off the record**. Students should not Tweet or share information from class on Facebook or other forms of social media.

If you miss class, it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to obtain material missed through other students. 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>.

HOMEWORK

Every week, students will read a news story or series of news stories and pick out five different types of public records that were used to tell the stories. You'll submit your answers using this Google form: <https://goo.gl/forms/Jd8rIS2vdC8InHE82> . You'll lose points if the sources you identify are not actually public records as defined in class.

GRADE CALCULATION

Quizzes - 600 points

Six quizzes will make up the bulk of your grade. The quizzes will be a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. Each quiz is worth 100 points. Here are the quiz dates:

Sept. 14, 2016

Sept 28, 2016

Oct. 12, 2016

Oct. 26, 2016

Nov. 9, 2016

Nov. 16, 2016

Class participation - 200 points

Up 200 points will be awarded for participating in group exercises and completing homework assignments on time. You'll lose points for late, missing or sub-par work.

At their discretion, the instructors will add or subtract points based on class participation. Absences and excessive tardiness may be factored into the points a student receives for class participation, as well. Deductions will be at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Final exam - 200 points

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

Computer needs and behaviors: Weekly computer and online exercises will be conducted in the classroom, so it is strongly encouraged for students to come to class with a laptop. Laptop are to be used only for classroom assignments. Use for other reasons, including unrelated email or messaging, will result in lost points from a student's class participation score. Lost points will be determined solely by the instructor based on the infraction and whether a student had been previously warned. The same rules apply for cell phones and all other electronic devices.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Aug. 24, 2016

Fact Finding Introduction

Overview of the class and what it will cover. What's a public record and what's not. How to make a Florida public records request. We'll break into working groups and talk about getting into a documents state of mind. There will be an in-class assignment, followed by class discussion.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Forest Haven is Gone, But the Agony Remains

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/daily/march99/grouphome14.htm>

Residents Languish, Profiteers Flourish

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/daily/march99/grouphome15.htm>

Aug. 31, 2016

Official Records

LaForgia will teach you the basics about official records, which include property deeds, marriage licenses, lien filings, court judgments and other tools reporters use every day to gather basic facts about people, places and businesses.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Lawmaker's home sale questioned

http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/uniontrib/20050612/news_1n12windfall.html

MASILOTTI DIVORCE PAPERS REVEAL LAND DEAL

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBTkRkTTFMdGRHQUU>

Left with nothing

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/09/08/left-with-nothing/>

Sept. 7, 2016

Introduction to using data as fact-finding tool

Playford will introduce you to the basics of using spreadsheets and other tools to organize the information you can get from sources such as official records.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

'Flip that house' fraud cost billions

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090719/ARTICLE/907191031?p=all&tc=pgall>

Flippers' toll: On Gulf Coast, half a billion in defaults

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090720/ARTICLE/907201040?p=all&tc=pgall>

Sept. 14, 2016

Quiz 1 on official records

Cop records

LaForgia will teach you the basic records reporters use on the crime beat, including lists of calls for service, police reports, arrest affidavits, jail bookings and autopsy reports.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

The informer, the cop & the conspiracy: Snitch says narc lied to jail alleged drug dealers. Did he?

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBdWRvSy1RMLBNUm8>

Cop added insult to injury, she says

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBR3dBbXFLYTEteTQ>

DRUG RAIDS GONE BAD; Shopkeepers say plainclothes cops barged in, looted stores & stole cash

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBRW0wbDFPX2hlazA>

Sept. 21, 2016

Cop records

Playford will show you how to use data to draw conclusions and find stories on the crime beat.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Women victimized twice in police game of numbers

<http://inquirer.philly.com/packages/crime/html/sch101799.asp>

How police use a new code when sex cases are 'unclear'

<http://inquirer.philly.com/packages/crime/html/sch101899.asp>

Sept. 28, 2016

Quiz 2 on cop records

Using court records

LaForgia will introduce you to how reporters use court records to break news regardless of their beat. The class will cover searching for and accessing records in the criminal, civil and administrative sides of state court and will briefly touch on the criminal and civil sides of federal court.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

THE VERDICT: DISHONOR

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBUnpxMmJOeWdzV0k>

Texas man executed on disproved forensics; Fire that killed his 3 children could have been accidental

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBd09iZ1VTcjZqS3c>

Oct. 5, 2016

Data and the courts

Playford will show you how to build and analyze databases using court records.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

JUSTICE WITHHELD

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBRGj6YzJlNVQ3QWc>

ODDS FAVOR WHITES FOR PLEA DEALS

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBZVBJSnJEbF92ZDQ>

A SECOND CHANCE TURNS INTO MANY

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBTEjMwS0hNNjg>

Oct. 12, 2016

Quiz 3 on court records

Using business records

Via Skype, LaForgia will show you how to locate and read state business filings for privately held companies. You'll learn how to use these records as a reporting tool regardless of whether you cover business. You'll also learn the basics of locating and reading Forms 990 for nonprofits.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Under the radar

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBMk51b0h4c3Q3MzA>

Debt-collecting machine

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2013/12/08/debt-collecting-machine/>

Time Warner Center: Symbol of the Boom

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/nyregion/stream-of-foreign-wealth-flows-to-time-warner-condos.html>

Oct. 19, 2016

Data and business records

Playford will walk you through techniques for capturing and analyzing businesses. He'll show you a template for building, by hand, a database to identify the officers and directors of a company and to reveal whether they have criminal histories.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Secret Files Expose Offshore's Global Impact

<https://www.icij.org/offshore/secret-files-expose-offshores-global-impact>

Giant Leak of Offshore Financial Records Exposes Global Array of Crime and Corruption

<https://panamapapers.icij.org/20160403-panama-papers-global-overview.html>

Oct. 26, 2016

Quiz 4 on business records

School board and local governments

LaForgia will give you an introduction to the types of records you can use on the education beat and on the county and city beats. He'll show you what sorts of records to look for, and how to get them, to expose official misdeeds.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Filth didn't stop referrals

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/hillsborough-agency-sent-the-homeless-8212-and-huge-amounts-of-cash-8212/2149224>

A home, but no help

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/hillsborough-county-sent-the-sick-and-dying-to-squalid-unlicensed-home/2153941>

'Robbed' by the system

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/county-recoups-homeless-aid-from-deaf-4-year-old/2158216>

Little action despite alarm

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/county-ignored-warning-signs-about-homeless-program/2158759>

Nov. 2, 2016

Small government, big data

Playford will show you how to wrangle big databases using education records and government spending records as examples.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Why Pinellas County is the worst place in Florida to be black and go to public school

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/chart-failing-black-students/>

Failure Factories

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/5-schools-segregation/>

Lessons in Fear

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/lessons-in-fear-violence/>

Fundamentally Unequal

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/fundamental-schools/>

Nov. 9, 2016

Quiz 5 on school board and local government records

Regulators and licensing records

LaForgia will show you how to use licensing and regulatory records to reveal information about doctors, teachers and other professionals.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then list in the Google form five of the types of public records they relied on:

Toxic Treats

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/candy-219217-lead-truck.html>

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/chili-219220-lead-chilies.html>

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/treats-219223-candy-makers.html>

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/toxic-219227-laguna-treats.html>

Nov. 16, 2016

Regulators and licensing records

Playford will briefly show you how to organize and sort regulatory records to draw conclusions about larger groups of regulated professionals.

Quiz 6 on licensing and regulators

Due next week

Nothing.

Nov. 23, 2016

Thanksgiving. No class.

Due next week

Nothing.

Nov. 30, 2016

Exam review

Due next week

Nothing.

Dec. 7, 2016

Final exam in class.

GRADING POLICIES

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

ACCOMMODATION OF 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.

MAKEUP WORK

Make-up assignments and exams are not permitted. However, under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the professor was notified in advance, an exception may be made.

ONLINE 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, but students will be given specific times when they are open. 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://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-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. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center:

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.