

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding

Spring semester 2017, 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 individual and group exercises and in six short quizzes.

Sixty percent of your grade will be determined by your performance on the quizzes. Your grade will also factor in , the final exam participation in class exercises and discussion.

ATTENDANCE AND RULES OF THE ROAD

Class attendance is mandatory and, because there is no text book requirement in this course, critical to understanding the concepts. The material covered on the quizzes and final can only be learned by attending class regularly.

Students with more than one unexcused absence may lose all points available for in-class assignments. Additional absences will result in further penalties at the 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 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 in Canvas. You'll lose points if the sources you identify are not actually public records as defined in class. Submit five records total, not five per story, but identify which story uses each type of record.

GRADE CALCULATION - 1,000 points total

Quizzes - 600 points

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

Jan. 25, 2017

Feb. 8, 2017

Feb. 22, 2017

March 15, 2017

March 29, 2017

April 5, 2017

Homework - 72 points

There are twelve reading assignments, worth six points each. You'll lose points for late, missing or sub-par work.

Reporting plan - 80 points

You will have one written out-of-class assignment, a midterm paper: A 3-4 page reporting plan, which will be assigned Feb. 8 and due March 1.

In-class assignments - 48 points

There will be as many as three graded in-class assignments, worth a total of 48 points. Assignments will be completed in class but will be announced one week in advance.

Final exam - 200 points

The final exam will be held on the last class of the semester. It will include both a multiple-choice section, similar to the quizzes, and a free-response section in the same format as the midterm paper.

At their discretion, the instructors will add or subtract points based on class participation. Absences and excessive tardiness may result in lost points. Deductions will be at the discretion of the instructor.

Extra credit points may be awarded for excellent class participation or for completing optional extra-credit assignments.

HERE IS OUR 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

THIS IS IMPORTANT: The journalism school requires a minimum grade of a C in this course. If you end the semester with fewer than 700 of 1,000 points, you may have to retake it.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

Computer needs and behaviors: Weekly computer and online exercises will be conducted in the classroom, so it is required that students come to class with a laptop. Laptops 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 by the instructor based on the infraction and whether a student had been previously warned. The same rules apply for cell phones and other electronic devices.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Quizzes and other graded assignments are underlined

Jan. 4, 2017

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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>

Jan. 11, 2017

Records in the digital age

Playford will introduce you to the basics of getting records electronically and using spreadsheets to organize your reporting and draw conclusions.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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/>

Jan. 18, 2017

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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>

Jan. 25, 2017

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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=0B6bakXn2DvZBdWRvSy1RMIBNUM8>

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>

Feb. 1, 2017

Exploring crime data

Playford will show you how to find and analyze crime rates to compare police departments' effectiveness.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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>

Feb. 8, 2017

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

Your midsemester reporting plan will be assigned in this class and due March 1

By Monday, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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>

Feb. 15, 2017

Finding trends in court data

Playford will show you how to obtain court records digitally and how a tool called a pivot table can help you use data to answer bigger questions.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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=0B6bakXn2DvZBTExJdjMwS0hNNjg>

Feb. 22, 2017

Quiz 3 on court records

Using business records

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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>

March 1, 2017

Your reporting plan is due

Writing the data story: Government salaries

Playford will show you how you to analyze a government salary database to find a local news story, and how to write about what you find.

Due after spring break

By Monday, March 13, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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>

March 8, 2017

No class: Spring break

March 15, 2017

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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>

March 22, 2017

Comparing communities

Playford will show you key ways to compare cities, counties and neighborhoods with data from the U.S. Census and other sources.

Due next week

By Monday, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of 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/>

March 29, 2017

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 submit in Canvas a list of 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>

April 5, 2017

Quiz 6 on licensing and regulators

Building a simple data-driven investigation

Using the skills you've learned up to here, Playford will show you how to build a spreadsheet that will allow you to write investigative stories about larger groups of regulated professionals.

Due next week

Nothing.

April 12, 2017

Exam review

Due next week

Nothing.

April 19, 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.