

# JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding

Spring semester 2018, University of Florida

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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, homework, and 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 unexcused absences may lose points available for in-class assignments and quizzes. Additional absences will result in further penalties at the discretion of the instructors. Absences approved by the instructors 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 records that were used to tell the stories. You will also be asked to identify the information the records were used to prove. 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. 24, 2018

Jan. 31, 2018

Feb. 7, 2018

Feb. 14, 2018

Feb. 21, 2018

Feb. 28, 2018

Homework: 100 points

There are 10 reading assignments, worth 10 points each. You'll lose points for missing or sub-par work.

In-class assignment: 100 points

There will be one graded in-class assignment, worth a total of 100 points.

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.

At their discretion, the instructors may 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

**NOTE: 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. 10, 2018**

Fact Finding Introduction

Overview of the class and what it will cover. Case study: Fatal accident at Tampa Electric.

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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

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>

## **Jan. 17, 2018**

Cop records

Kat 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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

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>

## **Jan. 24, 2018**

Quiz 1 on cop records

Court records

Adam 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 submit in Canvas a list of five of the types of public records they relied on, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

'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. 31, 2018**

### Quiz 2 on court records

Official records

Kat 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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

Under the radar

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

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>

Debt-collecting machine

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

## **Feb. 7, 2018**

### Quiz 3 on official records

Business records

Adam 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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

Filth didn't stop referrals

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

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/>

**Feb. 14, 2018**

Quiz 4 on business records

Local government and education records

Kat will give you an introduction to the types of records you can use on the education and local government beats. She'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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

Toxic Treats

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

**Feb. 21, 2018**

## Quiz 5 on local government and education records

### Regulators and licensing records

Adam 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, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

NEGLECTED TO DEATH | Part 1: Once pride of Florida; now scenes of neglect

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/special-reports/neglected-to-death/article1938076.html>

NEGLECTED TO DEATH | Part 2: Assisted-living facility caretakers unpunished: 'There's a lack of justice'

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/special-reports/neglected-to-death/article1938087.html>

**Feb. 28, 2018**

## Quiz 6 on regulators and licensing records

### How to get records

Kat will teach you how to file a public records request in Florida, some of the obstacles you may encounter, and how the state public records law can be your friend. She'll also show you how to use records to generate story ideas.

Due after the break:

By Monday, March 12, read these stories and then submit in Canvas a list of **five records, including at least two databases**, they relied on, and the fact/s the records and databases were used to prove:

Women victimized twice in police game of numbers

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

JUSTICE WITHHELD

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6bakXn2DvZBRGJ6YzJlNVQ3QWc>

## March 7, 2018

No class. Spring break.

## March 14, 2018

Introduction to electronic records

Adam will introduce you to the basics of getting records contained in databases 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 databases** they relied on (**can include both government data and databases built by the reporters**), and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

Cops are among Florida's worst speeders

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/speeding-cops/fl-speeding-cops-20120211-story.html#nt=oft13a-1gp1>

For Their Eyes Only

<http://data.newsday.com/crime/police-misconduct/>

Police misconduct: What do your elected officials think?

<http://data.newsday.com/crime/law-enforcement-reform/>

## March 21, 2018

Using data in stories

Adam will teach you how start with a spreadsheet, calculate totals and write them into strong news copy.

Due next week:

By Monday, read this story and and then submit in Canvas a list of **five of the sources (people sources, public records, etc.)** it relied on, and the fact/s the records were used to prove:

Worthy of Survival

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/features/pulse-shooting-survivor-angel-santiago-recovery/>

**March 28, 2018**

Interviewing

Kat will teach you how to earn the trust of your sources, how to ask smart questions and handle tough situations.

Due next week:

TBA

**April 4, 2018**

Guest speaker: TBA

Due next week: Nothing.

**April 11, 2018**

Putting it all together

Graded in-class assignment

Due next week: Nothing

**April 18, 2018**

Exam review

Due next week: Nothing.

**April 25, 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/](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.

## **MAKE-UP 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.