

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding, Class No. 17932, Section 19HC

Fall semester 2018, University of Florida

Mondays 3p-6p, Weil Room 0238

Description:

Students will learn methods for gathering and analyzing public records used by practicing journalists. They will walk away with an understanding of the importance of public records for backgrounding businesses and people and for uncovering information, including identifying prospective human sources. They will discover what kinds of records are available to reporters in Florida and beyond. And they will get practical experience finding those records and using them to generate story ideas. The class meets weekly. To prepare, students will read stories showcasing how some of the nation's best newspaper journalists use documents to expose official misdeeds. Students will apply their knowledge in individual and group exercises and four quizzes. Your grade will also factor in the final exam, homework, and in-class exercises and discussion.

Attendance:

Class attendance is mandatory. You will be permitted one unexcused absence without penalty. Further unexcused absences will result in deductions of 50 points each off your grade. The material covered on the quizzes and final can only be learned by attending class regularly. Absences may be approved by the instructor in advance and generally will reflect extreme circumstances, such as illness.

If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining material missed through your classmates.

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:

Office hours will be 10a to 2p Tuesdays at my office at Weimer 2066C. I am also generally available by appointment on other days or evenings. My email is tbridis@ufl.edu. I will generally respond within 24 hours to email inquiries during weekdays or within 48 hours during weekends.

Homework:

Students will read specific news stories assigned by the instructor, identify the types of public records the authors used in their reporting and submit those answers in Canvas.

Grading:

Four quizzes will be based on the lecture material only and will be a combination of multiple choice and true/false questions. Each quiz is worth 100 points. There are five reading assignments, worth 20 points each. There will be three graded in-class assignments, worth 100 points each. The final exam will be worth 200 points on the last class of the semester. Extra-credit points may be awarded for meritorious class participation or completing optional extra-credit assignments.

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:

We will use our computers and online services each week in the classroom, so students must come to class with a laptop. Please use them only for classroom assignments. We will take breaks during classes for you to check messages, emails or social media accounts.

Grading policies:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

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/) 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 permitted when absences are deemed acceptable due to documented medical reasons, religious holidays or other activities at the discretion of the instructor.

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:

"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 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.

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):

Aug. 27

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

How "fact finding" can go horribly wrong

Sept. 3 (holiday)

Sept. 10

U.S. Freedom of Information Act: Requirements, exemptions, strategies

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Sept. 17

U.S. Freedom of Information Act (cont'd)

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

Guest speaker tbd

Quiz

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Sept. 24

LexisNexis Public Records data service review, demonstration

Police & court records, including Pacer

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Oct. 1

Following the money: politicians' financial disclosures, tax returns, bankruptcy records, property records

Guest speaker tbd

Quiz

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Oct. 8

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

Oct. 15

Business of business: SEC filings, LLC registrations, federal & state tax enforcement, regulatory and license enforcement, patents & trademarks, press releases

Quiz

Oct. 22

State and federal government business contracts; educational records

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Oct. 29

Mining social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tineye, Banjo, SamDesk)

Internet records: Whois, Arin, MX, Tracert, Email tracking

Quiz

Nov. 5

Transportation issues & accidents: Plane, trains, automobiles, boats, pipelines, etc.

Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a mock reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

Nov. 12 (holiday)

Nov. 19

Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

Nov. 26

Pulling it all together for an in-class assignment: a mock reporting exercise based on a fictional, breaking news event or an assignment to investigate a politician, appointee or other news figure

Dec. 3

Review for final exam

Dec. 10

Final exam

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. 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 and indicted. 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 Investigative Reporters & Editors 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 also 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 Donald Trump winning the presidency. Bridis previously covered technology, hackers, national security and the Justice Department for the AP in Washington, where he has worked since 1998. He spent two years at the Wall Street Journal, where he covered technology policy and computer and national security and witnessed Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon, before returning to AP to head coverage of the 9/11 terrorism investigations. He has a journalism degree from the University of Missouri.