

## **JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding, Class No. 16318, Section 3335**

Spring semester 2019, University of Florida

Wednesdays 3p-6p, Weimer 1076

### **Description:**

Students will learn methods used by practicing journalists for gathering and analyzing public records and publicly accessible records. They will learn to understand the importance of public records for backgrounding people, organizations and businesses, 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 learn practical experience finding 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 homework, discussion and four graded in-class exercises.

### **Attendance:**

The material covered on the quizzes and final can only be learned by attending class regularly. If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining material missed through your classmates. You also are responsible for arranging to complete any missed quizzes, assignments or other graded work. 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](mailto: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 four graded in-class assignments, worth 100 points each. 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 70 percent, 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 and make sure it has an adequate charge. There are outlets for charging but not enough for everyone to use each class. 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/](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.

#### Textbooks:

The textbook for this course is, "The Manual to Online Public Records: The Researcher's Tool to Online Resources of Public Records and Public Information," by Michael L Sankey and Cynthia Hetherington. Although not required, students will find it useful to own a copy of "The Associated Press Guide to News Writing: The Resource for Professional Journalists," by Rene J. Cappon.

#### 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://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-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>, 352-392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 911 for emergencies.

Weekly schedule (subject to adjustments, which I will announce):

Jan. 9

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

Jan. 16

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

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Jan. 23

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

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

Quiz

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Jan. 30 (no class, professor traveling on UF business)

Feb. 6

LexisNexis Public Records data service review, demonstration

Police & court records, including Pacer

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Feb. 13

In-class graded exercise: Draft a US FOIA request and a Florida open records request

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

Guest speaker tbd

Quiz

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

Feb. 20

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

Feb. 27

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

Quiz

March 6 (Spring Break, no class)

March 13

State and federal government business contracts; educational records

Assigned reading (news article tbd)

March 20

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

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

Quiz

March 27

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

April 3

In-class review and exercises for upcoming graded assignments

April 10

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

April 17

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

April 24

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

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. In addition to teaching, he currently also works as a consulting editor with journalists internationally for Freelance Investigative Reporters and Editors, a project of Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc. 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 imprisoned. 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.