

SYLLABUS¹
Applied Fact Finding (JOU 3110/Section 0863)
Summer A 2015
Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, Periods 4-5
12:30-3:15 p.m.
Turlington Hall 2322

Instructor: Rich Shumate, M.A. (shumater@ufl.edu)

Office: Weimer G038

Office Hours: Mondays 2 -3 p.m.
Thursdays 11 a.m.-Noon
Or By Appointment

Prerequisite: 3109c Multimedia Writing and JM designation

Course Overview

This course is designed to teach students how to use a wide variety of public records, reference materials and Internet resources to gather information as a reporter. Students will also learn how to analyze, interpret, present and apply such data. This course combines lecture and discussion with hands-on training to build student skills. The research topics covered include:

- Using Florida public records for major governmental agencies.
- Understanding and using Florida's public records laws.
- Using available governmental and commercial databases, with an emphasis on Internet resources.
- Using Excel to manipulate newsworthy data.
- Evaluating and critically examining collected data for journalistic purposes.

Upon completion, student will be able to:

- Critique the quality of the news media based on gathered information.
- Demonstrate an ability to effectively access public records.
- Develop user-friendly ways to present information.
- Analyze basic datasets in Excel.
- Write news stories based on public records information.
- Complete a Freedom of Information Act request.

Required Materials

Secrets of the Scoop, an online course tool. Access costs \$75 and must be purchased through Paypal at:

<http://www.idiganswers.com/pages/scoopsignupUF.html>

Within a few hours of purchase, students will receive custom passwords and instructions on how to access the site in an e-mail from Joe Adams. (Note, use the passwords from Joe Adams (recordscoach@yahoo.com), not those sent by Paypal.)

Other Resources:

Other readings and materials will be posted on Canvas and the University of Florida's Electronic Course Reserves (<https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/>)

Grading

Your grade will be evaluated based on your performance in the following areas:

Exams (2)	30%
Reading Quizzes (13)	13%
News stories (2)	14%
FOIA Request	6%
Excel Assignment	7%
Group project*	20%
Class Participation	10%

*The grade on the group project will be based 90% on the actual project grade and 10% on the group's evaluations of each other's work.

Grading:

A: 90–100
B+: 87-89
B: 80-86
C+: 77-79
C: 70-76
D+: 67-69
D: 60-66
E: Below 60

Assignments:

- Two exams, covering material in the first and second sections of the course. The second exam will not be a final exam.
 - Reading quizzes at the beginning of each class session, covering material assigned for that session, starting in Week 1, Class 2.
 - Two news stories of approximately 750 words. Students will be able to write on any topic they choose, provided they use public records in their reporting. These stories must be specifically written for this class. If the story is subsequently published, students can earn 15 points of extra credit.
- Note: Stories will be graded using the deductions system for AP Style/grammar errors used in Multimedia Writing and Reporting, including -50 for fact errors.**

- FOIA request. Students will prepare an FOIA request, using guidelines in Florida's sunshine laws.
- Excel assignment. Students will complete an exercise manipulating data using Excel spreadsheets.
- Group project. Working as part of a team, students will be given an address in Alachua County and will have to prepare a comprehensive dossier on the people who live in that address, using only public records.
- Class participation. Students will be evaluated on their attendance and participation in class sessions.

Technology Requirement

Students need to come to class with a laptop or tablet equipped for Internet access, as some class activities require connectivity. However, students should not use class time to engage in any online activities not related to this course.

Attendance

Course attendance is **mandatory**. Students are expected to show up **on time** for class meetings, as outlined in this syllabus. Reading quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, and students who are late **will not be allowed to make them up**. If a student needs to miss a class for any reason, he or she must contact the instructor, either in person or by email, in advance of the absence. **Students who do not contact the instructor in advance will not be allowed to make up the work they have missed.**

Acceptable reasons for an absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, and professional conferences), military obligations, severe weather conditions, religious holidays, participation in official university activities and court-imposed legal obligations. The instructor, at his discretion, may ask for documentation of the reason for an absence.

Late Work

Work must be turned in on the due date. **Late work will be penalized 10 points and will become a zero if it is turned in more than one week late.**

Group Work

This course includes work in groups. All group members are responsible for the content within the final project. If problems arise, group members are encouraged to attempt to work out differences among members before alerting the instructor.

Group members will evaluate each other at the end of the project, which will count 10 percent of the final project grade.

Extra Credit

The instructor may provide students with an extra credit opportunity to participate in research activity. If such an opportunity arises, the instructor will notify students.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the University of Florida rules for academic integrity, including the Honor Code. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand plagiarism. Students can use this tutorial to familiarize themselves with the definition of plagiarism: <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/whatisplag.php>

Academic dishonesty will result in a zero on the assignment and could lead to failure in the course. The instructor will report any violations of the Honor Code to the Dean of Students Office, in accordance to the University of Florida policy.

Students with Disabilities

All students with disabilities will be accommodated, after the instructor receives a letter from the Disability Resource Center (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>).

Cell Phones

Cell phones should be turned off at the start of class. Please do not use cell phones during class.

Food/Drink

Drinks are allowed, but please don't bring food to class, i.e. each lunch before you arrive.

Changes to Syllabus

The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus or course schedule as the need arises.

This syllabus is adapted from previous syllabi for this course prepared by Dr. Cory Armstrong and Dr. Mariam Alkazemi.

Tentative Course Schedule

Date	Lecture Topic	Reading Assignment Due
Week 1/Class 1 Tuesday, May 12, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of course syllabus. • Defining fact finding. • Why is fact finding important? • Who is the audience? 	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 1: The power of public records
Week 1/Class 2 Wednesday, May 13, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary and secondary sources • Finding information • Using directories • Discovering simple resources in the Library • Understanding sources 	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 2: Public records thinking: Wear your public records glasses and Ch. 3: Joe's three HUGE records rules
Week 1/Class 3 Thursday, May 14, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet as Journalist's tool • Search engines • Finding & using information • Downloading files 	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 11, <u>Web sites you shouldn't work without</u>
Week 2/Class 1 Tuesday, May 19, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal agencies • Freedom of Information Act • Florida's Sunshine Laws • County Offices 	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 5: Florida's public records laws and you E-Reserves: <i>Computer Assisted Reporting</i> Ch. 4: Spreadsheets, Part 1
Week 2/Class 2 Wednesday, May 20, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate and appraisal rights • Property searches • Mortgages and taxes • Building Permits <p>Final Projects Assigned</p>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 4: <u>Six ways to build awareness of what's out there</u> and Ch. 6: <u>Navigating public records for success</u>

<p>Week 2/Class 3 Thursday, May 21, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences between criminal and civil court • Court records and documents • Types of civil courts • Understanding the civil case <p>FOIA Request Due</p>	<p>Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 9: Essential offices, Part II: Circuit court clerk</p>
<p>Week 3/Class 1 Tuesday, May 26, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal court records • Arrest reports • Law enforcement records • Grand juries • Prosecution • How to track racial profiling 	<p>Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 12: <u>Just knowing the records isn't enough</u></p> <p>E-Reserves: <i>Computer Assisted Reporting</i> Ch. 3: Spreadsheets, Part 2</p>
<p>Week 3/Class 2 Wednesday, May 27, 2015</p>	<p>Exam 1 Group Project Work</p>	
<p>Week 3/Class 3 Thursday, May 28, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importing Data on Microsoft Excel • Learning Microsoft Excel functions 	<p>E-Reserves: <i>Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News</i>, Ch. 3: Working with Graphics</p>
<p>Week 4/Class 1 Tuesday, June 2, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health insurance regulations • Prescription drugs • Health industry trends and norms <p>News Story 1 Due</p>	<p>Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 7: <u>Dealing with denials</u></p>
<p>Week 4/Class 2 Wednesday, June 3, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate records online • Commercial property; bankruptcy; • Public companies and the SEC 	<p>Ch. 15: Public records as multi-media tools</p>

<p>Week 4/Class 3 Thursday, June 4, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online campaign reports • Financial disclosures for public officials • Federal, state and local election reporting • Special interests and PACs • Types of election stories <p>Excel Assignment Due</p>	<p>Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 8: <u>Essential offices, Part I: Secretary of State</u></p>
<p>Week 5/Class 1 Tuesday, June 9, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized testing • Education records • Teaching certification • Higher education 	<p>Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 13: Conquering the beat through public records;</p>
<p>Week 5/Class 2 Wednesday, June 10, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government regulations • U.S. Census • Examining diversity within communities • Presenting material 	<p>Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 14: Play the cross-check game! and Ch. 16: With each story: Got records?</p>
<p>Week 5/Class 3 Thursday, June 11, 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event organization • Ethics of information gathering • Danger of sensationalism • Using “damaging” information <p>News Story 2 Due</p>	<p>Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 10: Public records you must know to hit the ground running and Ch. 17: Closing Thoughts and thanks</p>
<p>Week 6/Class 1 Tuesday, June 16, 2015</p>	<p>Exam 2 Group Project Work</p>	
<p>Week 7/Class 2 Wednesday, June 17, 2015</p>	<p>Writing day: take the time to work on your final projects.</p>	
<p>Week 6/Class 3 Thursday, June 18, 2015</p>	<p>Final projects due in Weimer G038 by Noon.</p>	