

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding- Section 3335\*  
Summer A 2013: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays, 12:30-3:15 p.m. in Weimer 1076

Taught by: Mariam F. Alkazemi ([alkazemi@ufl.edu](mailto:alkazemi@ufl.edu))

Weimer G029, Office Hours:

Weeks 1-4: Friday 12:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.

Week 5: Monday (June 10) 10:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Week 6: Office hours canceled.

Office hours can also be made by appointment.

\*This syllabus is based on the syllabus for JOU 3110 created by Dr. Cory Armstrong.

### Course Overview

This course is developed to introduce you to resources that help journalists report factual information, including standard reference materials, public records, and Internet resources. This course includes the development of skills that will a journalist may need to analyze data that is available to the public using Excel. Another component of your course deals with the interpretation and presentation of information. A large component of the course will also focus on the practical applications of these search techniques by good reporters and editors.

The course will cover all aspects needed for a thorough journalistic search, including:

- Immersing in Florida public records for major governmental agencies.
- Investigating available commercial and government databases, with an emphasis on the Internet and the World Wide Web.
- Manipulating newsworthy data, including the use of spreadsheets such as Excel.
- Evaluating information and critically examining data collected.
- Discussing broad information sources that will appear to specific audiences within a diverse society.

As such, lecture and discussion will be a necessary component to the course. However, the course also requires hands-on training, so the setup of the course will include both lectures and computer lab work, including online exercises.

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.

Required E-book:

*Secrets of the Scoop.* To purchase a copy, please visit the following link: <http://www.idiganswers.com/pages/scoopsignupUF.html>

Once students purchase the courseware through Paypal, you will receive custom passwords and instructions on how to access the site. Within a few hours, you should receive an e-mail from Joe Adams ([recordscoach@yahoo.com](mailto:recordscoach@yahoo.com)).

E-Resources:

Other readings will be found on the University of Florida's Electronic Course Reserves. You may access the website through the following link: <https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/>

Evaluation

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

Midterm examination	20%
End of term examination	20%
Attendance quizzes	10%
Excel assignment	20%
Final group project	30%

Grading:

A	93.00 - 100.00	C	73.00 - 76.99
A-	90.00 - 92.99	C-	70.00 - 72.99
B+	87.00 - 89.99	D+	67.00 - 69.99
B	83.00 - 86.99	D	63.00 - 66.99
B-	80.00 - 82.99	D-	60.00 - 62.99
C+	77.00 - 79.99	F	0 - 59.99

### **Technology in the classroom**

You are encouraged to come to class with a laptop because you may be asked to participate in an activity, which requires a computer and online access. Since students are required to purchase a Mac, most exercises will be taught on a Mac computer. However, a student with a PC with Microsoft Excel will be able to complete all coursework.

The fact that you are expected to bring your computer to class does not mean that you should use class time to browse the internet, check e-mail or participate in any other activities that do not relate to the course. If your laptop use is disruptive, you may be asked not to use your privilege may be limited.

Further, I assume that all students check email and SAKAI regularly as part of the course.

### **Attendance**

Course attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to show-up on-time for class meetings, as outlined in this syllabus. Students are responsible for making up any material missed due to absences. If you are absent for any acceptable reasons, a note from the Dean of Students Office will be requested. (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/supportservices/>) According to the Registrar's Office at the University of Florida, an acceptable reason for an absence is outlined below:

“In general, acceptable reasons for absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused. Other reasons also may be approved.”

Source: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#absences>

Class attendance will be taken regularly throughout the semester, using a five-question quiz given at the beginning of class based on the Secrets of the Scoop. Those quizzes will count toward your attendance grade, and the lowest score will be dropped at the end of the semester. It is your responsibility to obtain material missed in class.

### **Late Work**

No late work will be accepted, without any exceptions. All assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class or earlier. Similarly, all readings are to be completed before the start of lecture on the day assigned.

### **Graded Exams**

Exams must be taken during the time specified in the syllabus, unless you have an absence excused under university policy, outlined at the following link:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

To review graded exams, please visit me during office hours. Removing exams from the classroom or my office may be considered cheating. Students who engage in such behavior will receive a zero on the exam, and may be reported as a violator of the code of academic integrity.

### **Make-ups**

Make-up assignments and exams are not permitted. In emergency situations, an exception may be made if you have an excused absence and the professor was notified in advance.

### **Group Work**

This course includes extensive work in groups. All group members are responsible for the content within the final project. Group members are encouraged to attempt to work out

differences among members before alerting the professor. In extreme cases, various group members may receive differing grades on their group projects.

### **Extra Credit**

Your professor may or may not provide students with an extra credit opportunity to participate in research activity. If an opportunity is available, students will be notified electronically.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to abide by the University of Florida rules for academic integrity. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand plagiarism. You may use the following tutorial to familiarize yourself 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 professor 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 professor 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. Students should not be texting or using their cell phones in other ways during class. Cell phones may be confiscated should their use be distracting.

### **Classroom Behavior and Disruptions**

Students are expected to be respectful of other students' right to hear and participate in classroom discussion. If you repeatedly disrupt classroom discussion, you may be asked to leave the classroom.

Any electronic communications with the professor are considered professional. Please make sure your electronic communication style is consistent with your professional goals. See: <https://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20121203004159-33236097-your-digital-body-language-don-t-ignore-it>

Especially respectful behavior is expected in the presence of guest lecturers. Several guest lecturers, who will share experience and knowledge for your benefit, will be expected over the course of the semester.

## Tentative course schedule

Date	Lecture Topic	Reading Assignment Due
Tuesday, May 14, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of course syllabus.</li> <li>• Defining fact finding.</li> <li>• Why is fact finding important?</li> <li>• Who is the audience?</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 1: The power of public records
Wednesday, May 15, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary and secondary sources</li> <li>• Finding information</li> <li>• Using directories</li> <li>• Discovering simple resources in the Library</li> <li>• Understanding sources</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 2: Public records thinking: Wear your public records glasses and Ch. 3: Joe's three HUGE records rules
Thursday, May 16, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet as Journalist's tool</li> <li>• Search engines</li> <li>• Finding &amp; using information</li> <li>• Downloading files</li> </ul> <p><i><b>Final project subjects assigned</b></i></p>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 11, Web sites you shouldn't work without  Download Final Project instructions from SAKAI and bring to class
Tuesday, May 21, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal agencies</li> <li>• Freedom of Information Act</li> <li>• Florida's Sunshine Laws</li> <li>• County Offices</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 5: Florida's public records laws and you  E-Reserves: <i>Computer Assisted Reporting</i> Ch. 4: Spreadsheets, Part 1
Wednesday, May 22, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real estate and appraisal rights</li> <li>• Property searches</li> <li>• Mortgages and taxes</li> <li>• Building Permits</li> </ul> <p><i>In-class activity: Online searching strategies; Group formation for final project.</i></p>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 4: Six ways to build awareness of what's out there and Ch. 6: Navigating public records for success

Thursday, May 23, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differences between criminal and civil court</li> <li>• Court records and documents</li> <li>• Types of civil courts</li> <li>• Understanding the civil case</li> </ul>	Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 9: Essential offices, Part II: Circuit court clerk
Tuesday, May 28, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal court records</li> <li>• Arrest reports</li> <li>• Law enforcement records</li> <li>• Grand juries</li> <li>• Prosecution</li> <li>• How to track racial profiling</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 12: Just knowing the records isn't enough  E-Reserves: <i>Computer Assisted Reporting</i> Ch. 3: Spreadsheets, Part 2
Wednesday, May 29, 2013	<b>Midterm examination</b>	
Thursday, May 30, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importing Data on Microsoft Excel</li> <li>• Learning Microsoft Excel functions</li> </ul>	E-Reserves: <i>Numbers in the Newsroom: Using Math and Statistics in News</i> , Ch. 3: Working with Graphics
Tuesday, June 4, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health insurance regulations</li> <li>• Prescription drugs</li> <li>• Health industry trends and norms</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 7: Dealing with denials and
Wednesday, June 5, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate records online</li> <li>• Commercial property; bankruptcy;</li> <li>• Public companies and the SEC</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Ch. 15: Public records as multi-media tools
Thursday, June 6, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online campaign reports</li> <li>• Financial disclosures for public officials</li> <li>• Federal, state and local election reporting</li> <li>• Special interests and PACs</li> <li>• Types of election stories</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Excel Assignment Due</i></b></p>	Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 8: Essential offices, Part I: Secretary of State

Tuesday, June 11, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized testing</li> <li>• Education records</li> <li>• Teaching certification</li> <li>• Higher education</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 13: Conquering the beat through public records;
Wednesday, June 12, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government regulations</li> <li>• U.S. Census</li> <li>• Examining diversity within communities</li> <li>• Presenting material</li> </ul>	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 14: Play the cross-check game! and Ch. 16: With each story: Got records?
Thursday, June 13, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event organization</li> <li>• Ethics of information gathering</li> <li>• Danger of sensationalism</li> </ul> Using “damaging” information	Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 10: Public records you must know to hit the ground running and Ch. 17: Closing Thoughts and thanks
Tuesday, June 18, 2013	<b>Timed final examination online on Sakai, to be taken during class time.</b>	
Wednesday, June 19, 2013	Writing day: take the time to work on your final projects.	
Thursday, June 20, 2013	<b>Final projects due.</b>  <b>You will receive specific instructions on where they should be submitted.</b>	