

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding

Fall 2013

Lecture: Section 5043, Wednesdays, Periods 8-10 in FLG 260

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No Required Text:

Some online readings available on SAKAI at <https://elearning2.courses.ufl.edu>

Optional text:

Florida Public Records Handbook, Joe Adams, Tallahassee: First Amendment Foundation, 2003. Currently sold out but used copies available online.

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

Course Objectives and Description:

Fact Finding is designed to give student journalists the skills to locate, interpret and analyze a broad variety of informational resources crucial to your success as a working journalist, including standard reference materials, public records, and Internet resources. You will learn and practice investigative journalism techniques and discover how to analyze and interpret commonly used data, including charts, reports and statistics often provided to journalists. Public records and other publicly available sources of information will be reviewed. 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:

- Examining standard references and libraries, such as the College's library.
- Immersing in Florida public records for major governmental agencies, including the Clerk of the Courts, Supervisor of Elections, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser and law-enforcement agencies.
- Investigating 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 chat exercises.

Upon completion, student will be able to:

- Evaluate information quality based on specific criteria.
- Demonstrate competency in effectively accessing public records.
- Develop user-friendly ways to showcase data and information.
- Analyze basic datasets in Excel.
- Organize information effectively for quick retrieval.

Requirements:

Computer needs and behaviors: Weekly computer and online exercises will be conducted in the classroom, so it is strongly encouraged for students to come to class with a laptop. Most exercises will be taught on a Mac computer, but a PC with Microsoft Excel will suffice for most work.

Students who bring a laptop to class are expected to use it for classroom-related activities during lecture. Please do not check email, participate in instant messaging or other non-class activity or during class time. Those students who continually engage in this behavior will be limited in laptop use during lecture. It is assumed that you will check email and SAKAI regularly as part of the course.

Attendance: Class attendance will be taken at unannounced points through the semester. *It is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to obtain material missed in class through other students.*

Assignments and Readings: All assignments must be turned in at the **BEGINNING** of class or earlier. *No exceptions.* All readings are to be completed before the start of lecture on the day assigned. All assignments will be posted on SAKAI by the date posted on the syllabus. It is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to bring a hard copy of the assignment to class for discussion. No hard copies will be provided by the instructor.

Evaluation¹:

Earning your grade:

Midterm examination— 100 points	20 percent
Final Examination— 100 points	20 percent
Online assignment— 100 points	10 percent
Attendance (class attendance)	10 percent
Discussion Posts—2 points each	10 percent
Research project— 100 points	30 percent

Grading Scale:

A = 92-100

A- = 90-91.99

¹ Some language in the course evaluation and miscellaneous sections of this syllabus was obtained with permission from a class syllabus of Dr. Robyn Goodman, UF Department of Advertising. Please note that when material is used from another source, it must be cited correctly. For further information, please consult the plagiarism/cheating section of this document.

B+ = 88-89.99
B = 82-87.99
B- = 80-81.99
C+ = 78-79.99
C = 72-77.99
C- = 70-71.99
D+ = 68-69.99
D = 62-67.99
D- = 60-61.99
Below 60 = E

Exam notes: Exams are open book and note. To review graded exams, please visit me during office hours. Any exams taken from the classroom at the time of the exam or from my office will result in a grade of zero, with the possibility that the student will be turned over to the University for cheating. Please be prepared to show a photo ID upon request at each exam. *The final exam is scheduled for 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 11 (per university schedule). You may not take it early or late, unless you have an absence excused under university policy.² You may, however, take a zero.*

Makeup: 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.

Group Projects: This course includes extensive work in groups. Each group is responsible for the content within the final project and to attempt to work out differences among members before alerting the professor. Under extenuating circumstances, grades may be differentiated based on work level.

Miscellaneous:

Plagiarism/Cheating:³ It is expected that you will exhibit ethical behavior in this class. Students are expected to do their own work, use their own words in papers, and to reference outside sources appropriately. Students are further expected to observe intellectual property rights and to comply with copyright laws. That means you must obtain written permission to use copyrighted materials in any work you submit for this class. It also means you will not plagiarize the words, designs, concepts or ideas of others.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or accidental, has become easier to commit since the advent of the Web. Plagiarism is defined as "...taking someone's words or ideas as if they were your own." Source: Dictionary.com.

That means you cannot take even a single sentence from another Web site without attribution. It means you cannot take someone else's design and replace the words and

² See university policy at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

³ Used with permission from UF Journalism Professor David Carlson.

pictures with your own. It means that if you use even a few of someone else's words verbatim, you must put quotation marks around them and cite the source.

Georgetown University offers a useful [tutorial](#) on plagiarism. It says:

- "If you use someone else's ideas or words, cite the source.
- "If the way in which you are using the source is unclear, make it clear.
- "If you received specific help from someone, acknowledge it."

If you find yourself wondering whether you have crossed the line of plagiarism, you almost assuredly have. When in doubt, ask the professor.

It is true that students sometimes plagiarize unintentionally or by accident. That is neither a defense nor an excuse. To avoid accidental plagiarism, it is extremely important to keep careful notes about what came from where, especially when doing online research. If you are cutting and pasting paragraphs from Web sites to your notes, you are in very risky territory; save the citations along with the material.

Your work will be checked for plagiarism, so just don't do it. Failure to uphold the standards of academic honesty will result in a failing grade for the course and, potentially, other serious disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.

Remember, when you completed the registration form at the University of Florida, you signed the following statement:

"I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University."

Furthermore, on work submitted for credit, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

If you are aware of a climate that promotes academic dishonesty, please notify the instructor or contact the Student Honor Court (392-1631) or Cheating Hotline (392-6999).

Special needs: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation of the necessary accommodation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. *This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.*

Lecture notes: A rough outline of lecture notes for the course will be available in SAKAI prior to the lecture. It is assumed that students will have printed out the lecture notes (as with assignments, discussed above) prior to coming to lecture for the day.

Extra Credit: Extra credit may be given for participation in outside research projects as determined by your instructor.

Cell phones: Turn them OFF during class. Please do not text-message during class. I will confiscate them if they continually disturb the class.

Class behaviors and disruptions: When attending classes, please be courteous of your neighbors and those who may be interested in learning the material within this class. Talking in class is not permitted, unless it pertains to questions for the professor. Repeated offenders of this policy may be asked to leave the classroom. Similarly, during online labs and training sessions, please pay attention, follow along and do not engage in unnecessary chatter. Those causing repeated disruptions in the classroom or training sessions may be asked to leave.

Tentative Course Schedule

Lecture Date	Topic	Required Reading
Week 1 August 21	<i>Course Introduction & Requirements Review</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Syllabus • Discussion of SAKAI E-Learning • What is fact finding? • Who is audience? • Why is this important? • 	
Week 2 August 28	<i>Introduction to the Library:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary and secondary sources • Finding information • Using directories • Discovering simple resources in the Library • Understanding sources <i>Exercise: Searching through Library records</i>	Review the following website (all six sections under info search): http://www.ipl.org/div/aplus/library.htm
Week 3 September 4	<i>Researching Online:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet as Journalist's tool • Search engines • Finding & using information • Downloading files <i>Exercise: Online searching strategies</i> Assignment: Online search Exercise Due September 11	Review the following website: http://www.classzone.com/books/research_guide/page_build.cfm?state=none&CFID=52198167&CFTOKEN=12821843
Week 4 September 11	<i>Introduction to Public Records:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal agencies • Freedom of Information Act • Florida's Sunshine Laws • County Offices Final project subjects assigned	<i>SAKAI Reading:</i> Florida in the Sunshine Download Final Project instructions from SAKAI and bring to class
Week 5 September 18	<i>Property Ownership: Records and Relationships</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate and appraisal rights • Property searches • Mortgages and taxes • Building Permits <i>Exercise: Group Computer Excel training</i> Discussion 1: Property Ownership	<i>SAKAI reading:</i> Going Digital: Strategies for Getting Data.
Week 6 September 25	<i>The Case File - Civil:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences between criminal and civil court • Court records and documents 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of civil courts • Understanding the civil case <p><i>Exercise: sifting through civil records</i></p>	
Week 7 October 2	<p><i>The Case File - Criminal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal court records • Arrest reports • Law enforcement records • Grand juries • Prosecution • How to track racial profiling <p>Review for Midterm Discussion 2: criminal records</p>	<i>SAKAI reading</i> Investigating Law Enforcement
Week 8 October 9	Mid-term Exam	
Week 9 October 16	<p><i>Health and Health Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance regulations • Prescription drugs • <i>Industry trends and norms</i> <p><i>Business Records:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate records online • Commercial property; bankruptcy; • Public companies and the SEC <p>Discussion 3: health and business</p>	<i>SAKAI reading:</i> Health and Health Care, Gaines
Week 10 October 23	<p><i>Elections & Political Records:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Follow the money’ • Online campaign reports • Financial disclosures for public officials • Federal, state and local election reporting • Special interests and PACs • Types of election stories <p>Discussion 4: elections</p>	<i>SAKAI reading:</i> New political reporting info, pp. 16-25
Week 11 October 30	<p><i>Education Records</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized testing • Education records • Teaching certification • Public/Private schools Higher education <p><i>Exercise: Finding key records and what to do with them</i></p> <p>Discussion 5: Education</p>	
Week 12 November 6	<i>Thinking outside the box: evaluating sources and gathering unusual</i>	

	<i>information</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government regulations • U.S. Census • Examining diversity within communities • Presenting material 	
Week 13 November 13	<i>Putting it all Together</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event organization • Ethics of information gathering • Danger of sensationalism Using “damaging” information <i>Exercise: Excel charts and how to use them.</i>	<i>SAKAI reading: Advances in Statistical Analysis</i>
Week 14 November 20	Catch Up and Wrap Up Final Exam Review <i>Workshop for final projects</i> Projects due by 3 p.m. to 3045 Weimer on November 25	
Week 15 November 27	No class on November 27	
Week 16 December 4	Final Exam	