

JOU 3110: Applied Fact Finding

Tu, Wed, Thurs, 12:30 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. – Summer A – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich

Required Text

Secrets of the Scoop (online class resource): \$75.00

- To purchase, go to <http://www.idiganswers.com/pages/scoopsignupUFsummer2012.html>
- After purchasing, go to <http://www.idiganswers.com> and select “Scoop Signin” to access chapters.
- This subscription will last through July. You may want to print/save/bookmark some of this material for future reference.

Course Objectives and Description¹

Fact Finding is designed to give student journalists the skills to locate, interpret and analyze a wide range 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. Public records and other publicly available sources of information will be reviewed. A large component of the course will 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, including the Clerk of the Courts, Supervisor of Elections, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser and law-enforcement agencies.
- Investigating commercial and government databases.
- 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.

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 work.

¹ Portions of this syllabus are used with permission from previous instructors of the course, including Dr. Cory Armstrong, UF Department of Journalism, and Ginny Lawrimore.

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.

Computer Use

This course requires the use of Sakai and email. Assignments, the syllabus, grades, and other course information will be found on Sakai. Students are responsible for reading announcements and emails from the class. You must have a good working knowledge of computers as they are essential to this course and will be used extensively during all phases of work. You will be doing quite a bit of work outside of class time. If you have a laptop (not required), please bring it to class as you will be able to work along with the instructor during lecture time.

If you bring a computer to class, please use it for class-related activities only so as not to disturb students around you.

Attendance

Attendance is required and will be taken at the start of each class via a sign-in sheet. Should you come into class late, it is your responsibility to sign-in. You may miss three days (unexcused) before you will no longer be able to pass the course. One class during the semester you will be required to attend a computer class meeting to train on Microsoft Excel and to prepare for your final project. When scheduled, this will be held during normal class hours.

If you miss class due to illness or any other excused reason, email me BEFORE class starts. If this is not possible, email me as soon as possible. You are responsible for all material missed.

Five-question quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, based on the readings from Secrets of the Scoop. The lowest quiz grade of the semester will be dropped.

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.

Course Requirements

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| ○ Quizzes | 10% |
| ○ Online Search assignment | 10% |
| ○ Election Records assignment | 10% |
| ○ Midterm Exam | 20% |
| ○ Final Exam | 20% |
| ○ Research Project | 30% |

Grading

A	92-100	C+	78-79.99	D+	68-69.99
A-	90-91.99	C	72-77.99	D	62-67.99
		C-	70-71.99	D-	60-61.99
B+	88-89.99				
B	82-87.99			E	Below 60
B-	80-81.99				

The grading scale is non-negotiable. A final grade of 87.99, for instance, is a B. All grades are final unless questions about grades are addressed in writing within 1 week after the grade is posted. If you have concerns about your grades please check with me sooner in the semester rather than later.

Exams

Exams are open note. Exam grades will not be discussed in class: please see me during office hours to review your exam. The final exam is scheduled for June 19, 2012, during class time. You may not take it early or late, unless you have an excused absence under university policy. If you need accommodations, please speak to me as soon as possible.

Make-up Work

Make-up work is not permitted. However, under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the instructor was notified in advance, an exception may be made.

Group Projects

This course includes group work. Each group is responsible for the content of the final project. Attempt to work out differences among members before alerting the instructor. Under extenuating circumstances, grades may be differentiated based on work level.

Plagiarism

All work completed for this course must respect the intellectual property of others. When using somebody else's copyrighted material, whether words, images, media, or ideas, proper credit must be given. If direct quotations are used, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and properly cited. If copyrighted material is used indirectly, it must still be properly cited!

If in doubt, include a citation. If you have any questions at all, ask your instructors before the project is submitted. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse!

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."

When submitting work for this course, the following honor pledge is implied:

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

If you are aware of 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.

Extra Credit

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

Email

As a media writer, you will do much professional communication via email. It's imperative that you appear competent in your emails, as you represent a larger organization (for this class, you represent UF when you speak with people in the community). Emails are often your first contact with a source, so you want to appear as credible as possible.

Guidelines for professional emails include:

- Proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation (no text speak)
- Clear subject lines
- Proper address. Use the person's real name (don't start with "Hey!") and use a title if warranted.
- Close the email as you'd close a letter, and be sure to put your name!

These guidelines apply to any emails you send me as well. I respond to student emails promptly and will gladly answer any questions you have about the course, but you must write a proper email. For instance, I am not a professor, so address me by my first name, not "Professor Frohlich." If your email suggests that you have the writing competency of a 10-year-old, I will not respond.

Tentative Course Schedule

SOTS = Secrets of the Scoop

Please note that this schedule will probably change before the semester is over

Date	Topic	Assignment/Have Read
Week 1 Tu, May 15	Course Introduction & Requirements Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Syllabus • Discussion of Sakai/e-book • What is fact finding? • What are public records? • Why are they important? 	
Wed, May 16	Introduction to Public Records <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public records: basic details • Exemptions, restrictions, limitations, etc. • Fees, penalties, litigation, etc. • Freedom of Information Act 	SOTS, Welcome and Ch. 1: The power of public records “Florida Government in the Sunshine: A Citizen’s Guide” under “Resources” in Sakai
Thurs, May 17	Property Ownership: Records & Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real estate and appraisal rights • Property searches • Mortgages and taxes • Building permits Research project guidelines and groups assigned.	SOTS, Ch. 5: Florida's public records laws and you Secrets of Scoop, Ch. 9, Essential offices, Part II: circuit clerk court
Week 2 Tu, May 22	The Case File - Civil <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences between criminal and civil court • Court records and documents • Types of civil courts • Understanding the civil case Assign online search assignment	SOTS, Ch. 2: Public records thinking: Wear your public records glasses
Wed, May 23	The Case File - Criminal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal court records • Arrest reports • Law enforcement records • Grand juries • Prosecution • How to track racial profiling Guest Speaker: Spencer Mann	SOTS, Ch. 3: Joe’s three HUGE records rules. SOTS, Ch. 12: Just knowing the records isn’t enough

Thurs, May 24	<p>Researching Online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet as the Journalist's tool • Search engines • Finding & using information • Downloading files • Facebook as source? 	SOTS, Ch. 11: Web sites you shouldn't work without
Week 3 Tu, May 29	<p>Computer-Mediated Reporting & Excel Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of data-driven content in journalism • Excel basics • Use of charts/graphs <p>Online search assignment DUE in class!</p>	SOTS, Ch. 15: Public records as multi-media tools
Wed, May 30	<p>Access to Local Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas of boards/agencies • Email • Financial reports • Bids and contracts • Code enforcement board records • Meeting laws <p>Review for midterm</p>	<p>Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 4, Six ways to build awareness of what's out there</p> <p>Secrets of the Scoop, Ch. 6, Navigating public records for success</p>
Thurs, May 31	MIDTERM EXAM	
Week 4 Tu, June 5	<p>Business Records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate records online • Commercial property; bankruptcy • Public companies and the SEC <p>Guest Speaker: Lisa Chinn Assign Election Records assignment</p>	SOTS, Ch. 10: Public records you must know to hit the ground running
Wed, June 6	<p>Elections & Political Records</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 	SOTS, Ch 8: Essential offices, Part I: Secretary of State
Thurs, June 7	<p>Education Records</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized testing • Education records • Teaching certification • Public/Private schools • Higher Education 	SOTS, Ch. 13: Conquering the beat through public records

Week 5 Tu, June 12	<p>Health & Health Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance regulations • Prescription drugs • Industry trends and norms <p>Election Records assignment DUE in class!</p> <p>Workshop on research projects, part I</p>	SOTS, Ch. 7: Dealing with denials
Wed, June 13	<p>Thinking Outside the Box: Evaluating Sources & Gathering Unusual Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government regulations • U.S. Census • Examining diversity within communities <p>Workshop on research projects, part II</p>	<p>SOTS, Ch. 16: With each story, got records?</p> <p>SOTS, Ch. 14: Play the cross-check game!</p>
Thurs, June 14	<p>Putting it All Together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event organization • Ethics of information gathering • Danger of sensationalism • Using “damaging” information <p>Review for Final Exam</p>	SOTS, Ch. 17: Closing thoughts and thanks
Week 6 Tu, June 19	FINAL EXAM	
Wed, June 20	Lab Time/extra office hours to work on Final projects	
Thurs, June 21	Research Projects due by 3 p.m. to Weimer G040	