

Applied Fact Finding - JOU 3110 - Fall 2024

Instructor: Brandon Meyer

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Phone: 954-789-5389 / Office: Weimer 3326 (Third floor of the INC)

Class hours/location: Online

Office hours: By appointment (M-Th: 9:30-11:30) Drop in: (Tue: 1:00-3:00)

Overview

You will learn sleuthing methods to gather and analyze public records and publicly accessible records.

You will learn to understand the importance of records for uncovering information about public figures including politicians, athletes, celebrities and other newsworthy people, organizations and businesses, and for identifying prospective information sources and verifying what people say about themselves.

You will discover what kinds of records are generally available in Florida and beyond, and learn strategies for finding and obtaining them for free or reduced costs.

You will gain practical experience finding records and using them to generate lines of inquiry. Although designed for journalists, the course will be useful for anyone who needs better, faster access to reliable information.

Your grade will be based on your homework, participation in a weekly online discussion platform and graded quizzes and tests.

Grading

Assignment	Total Points	Due Date
Quizzes (4)	400	Varies
Homework (5)	150	Varies
Discussion Posts (10)	150	Weekly
Tests (3)	450	Varies

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.

There are four quizzes that 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 assignments, worth 30 points each. There will be three graded tests, worth 150 points each. A participation grade worth up to 150 points will be awarded for weekly discussion posts.

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

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>
(Links to an external site.)

Materials

- All materials are included in the course
- Sign up for a Florida Data account at <https://www.fladata.com/signup.php>
- Install the Canvas app on your phone and tablet. Enable notifications.

Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge

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.

Integrity and honesty violations will be dealt with in accordance with the student honor code and the student conduct code. Here's a link:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

Attendance

You can learn the material only by watching the online course lectures and completing assigned readings and assignments.

You also are responsible for arranging to complete any missed quizzes, assignments, or other graded work within one week of your return to class.

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>

Classroom Accommodations

If you are in need of academic accommodations, please provide me with an accommodation letter and a list of accommodations you require. An accommodation letter can be obtained from the Disability Resource Center.

<https://disability.ufl.edu/students/accommodations/accommodation-letters/>

Diversity

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department of Journalism embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

I want to create a learning environment for you that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) To help accomplish this:

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know.
- If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please do not hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

- If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, Prof. Joanna Hernandez is an excellent resource. You can email her at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.
- If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

Office Hours

My office is Weimer 3326 and is located on the upper floor of the INC. I will usually be on-campus Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Appointments are preferable, but you're free to drop by any time.

Mental Health

College can be a stressful and difficult experience. You are being challenged like never before. If you feel overwhelmed or just need someone to talk to, my door is always open and my phone is always on. I spent five years of my life in combat zones. I am familiar with the concept of stress. While I may not be able to relate to your particular situation, I promise you I can point you in the right direction.

It's important that you know that every member of the staff is equipped to assist you in a time of distress. If you prefer to talk to someone outside of the college, the Counseling and Wellness Center website has a plethora of services that you might find useful <https://counseling.ufl.edu/resources/>

You may also reach them by phone at 352-392-1575.

At a minimum, talk to somebody.

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. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Artificial Intelligence

The use of any and all AI systems such as ChatGPT, Grok, Copilot, Claude and Gemini in the course of your work is prohibited. The industry is still figuring out if these systems have a place in the newsroom, and until there are standards, we will avoid their use. If you have a unique use case for AI in the course of your reporting, pitch it to me and an exception may be granted.

Schedule

Week	Module	Assignments
Week 1 - August 23	Orientation Module	Overview of the class, grading, office hours, textbook, expectations Introduction discussion assignment
Week 2 - August 30	Module 1 - Fact-Finding introduction	No homework this week No Discussion posts due this week
Week 3 - September 6	Module 2 - Covering Law Enforcement Part I	Homework assignment #1 due before 11:59 p.m. Sunday Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 4 - September 13	Module 3 - Covering Law Enforcement Part II	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 5 - September 20	Module 4 - Courts & the Criminal Justice System	Homework assignment #2 due before 11:59 p.m. Friday Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday Quiz #1
Week 6 - September 27	Module 5 - Investigating Public Figures	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday Homework assignment No. 3 due before 11:59 p.m. Friday

Week 7 - October 4	Module 6 - Covering Criminal Justice	No homework this week No discussion posts due this week
Week 8 - October 11	Module 7 - Investigating Everyday People	Quiz #2 Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 9 - October 18	Module 8 - U.S. Freedom of Information Act I	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday Homework assignment #4 due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 10 - October 25	Module 9 - U.S. Freedom of Information Act II	Quiz #3 Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 11 - November 1	Module 10 - Political Contributions, Lobbying, and Dark Money	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 12 - November 8	Module 11 - Investigating Businesses	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday Homework assignment #5 due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 13 - November 15	Module 12 - Investigating Charities	Discussion posts due before 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 14 - November 22	Module 13 - Review for Final Test	Quiz #4
Week 15 - November 29	Thanksgiving Break	No classwork
Week 16 - December 6	Module 14 - Final Test	Test #3

This schedule is subject to adjustments, which I will announce in advance.

Prof. Meyer's Weekly Schedule: Fall 2024						
Period	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	7:25-8:15					Off-Campus
2	8:30-9:20					
3	9:35-10:25	Office Hours (By Appointment)				
4	10:40-11:30	Office Hours (By Appointment)				
5	11:45-12:35	Lunch				
6	12:50-1:40	Fresh Take Florida	Office Hours (Drop-In)			
7	1:55-2:45				Breaking News	
8	3:00-3:50		Intro to Web Apps		Intro to Web Apps	
9	4:05-4:55	Advanced Reporting	Intro to Web Apps		Intro to Web Apps	
10	5:10-6:00	Advanced Reporting				
11	6:15-7:05					
12	7:20-8:10					
13	8:20-9:10					
14	9:20-10:10					
	Classrooms	Fresh Take Florida	WEIM 2052		Phone	(954) 789-5389
		Advanced Reporting	MCCA 2186		Email	brandon.meyer@ufl.edu
		Intro to Web Apps	WEIM 2056		Twitter	meyer0656
		Breaking News	WEIM 1090			