

# Preliminary course schedule

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As of Sept. 14, 2014. Guest speakers may be added.

## Class #1 (September 17): A documents state of mind

**Topics:** A "documents state of mind" / The value of documents and data / The right to documents and public records / Public vs. private records / State vs. federal public records laws / International trends in freedom of information

**Read before class for discussion:**

- The Bell, Calif., small-town corruption: "[Is a City manager Worth \\$800,000?](#)" and "[Bell's Money Flowed Uphill](#)"
- Landowners in Southwestern Virginia who were being cheated out of royalties: "[The Money Prison](#)"

**In class:** Your life in records / Confirming claims through records.

## Class #2 (September 24 ): Backgrounding on deadline

**Topics:** Typical records used in backgrounding on deadline / what's online and what isn't / resources for finding records far away / mistaken identity and verification / the special case of court records, esp. in New York.

**Read before class:**

- [Seattle Times' coverage](#) of officers shot:
- [Hazard in the Heartland](#), a television report on the explosion outside Midland, Texas. You'll have to look at the IRE version -- WFAA doesn't have an archive.
- [Washington Post coverage of the Virginia Tech](#) shootings:

(You should read all of these, but choose one to write me a short memo on the use of records and documents in the stories. Submit the memo **before 11:00pm, Sunday, Sep. 21 on Courseworks.**)

**In class:** Begin your breaking news exercise

1. Background a person in class online.
2. Background a building in class online.

Finish this assignment and submit a spreadsheet showing which sources you checked and what you found in each of them. Write two paragraphs about what you must confirm before you can use it and what you feel comfortable using in a story. Use **ONLY** online sources. **Due Sunday, Sep. 27 by 11pm.**

## Class #3 (October 1): Beat reporting

**Topics** Typical public affairs and specialty beats that the records that go with them / strategies for understanding and preparing for public records on your beat / Cultural and international issues in public records. Beats include: crime/courts; government and politics; business; health care; education

**Reading** TK

**In class** Choose an agency that you might have as a beat, find a public record and begin writing a proper FOI or public records request for a standard type of record that we discuss in class.

Finish this assignment and submit the public records request by **Sunday, Oct 5 by 11pm**

## Class #4 (October 8): Project and enterprise reporting

**Topics** From idea to records / Strategies in public records requests / Following the paper trail

**Reading:**

- Chapter 13 (XIII) of *10 Days in the Madhouse*, by Nellie Bly, 1887.
- "At State-Run Homes, Abuse and Impunity," by Danny Hakim, New York Times, March 12, 2011.
- "Collapse into Chaos" by Alberto Arce, on Honduran death squads, May 22, 2013. (Corrected version, fixing the middle name of one of the

primary actors, was published May 1.) To read how the story was reported, see the IRE contest entry. This is an example of how to get records when there are none.

- More tk

## **Class #5 (Wednesday, October 15): Finding, requesting and negotiating for public record databases**

(Joint class with the Stabile students)

Identifying the records you need; typical mash-ups / compared to what? / Using demographics, real estate records, weather and more as comparisons / from statistics to records and back