



Jour 302 Infomania: Information Management The University of Kansas

Instructor

Jonathan Peters is a professor in the School of Journalism, where he specializes in First Amendment and media studies, with affiliate research positions in the KU Information and Telecommunication Technology Center (exploring Internet policy) and the KU Surveillance Studies Research Center (exploring privacy protections for journalists and others who use cloud services). Peters is the press freedom correspondent for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, and he has blogged about free speech for the *Harvard Law & Policy Review*. He also has written for *Esquire*, *Wired*, *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Nation*, and PBS. He is the First Amendment chair of the American Bar Association Civil Rights Litigation Committee, and he practices law during his time off-campus as a volunteer attorney for the Student Press Law Center and the ACLU.

Contacting me

Don't hesitate to contact me with questions or comments, to talk hockey, etc. I'm quick to respond to email (jonathan.w.peters@ku.edu), and my office number is 205D in Stauffer-Flint Hall. My twitter feed is [@jonathanwpeters](https://twitter.com/jonathanwpeters). You're not obligated to follow me, but feel free to tweet at me and/or follow me—I tweet mostly about journalism, media law, and Ryan Lochte.

Class sessions

Monday/Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. in 204 Stauffer-Flint Hall.

So you want to be a journalist or a strategic-communications practitioner? And why not? People rave about your writing. You amaze them with your computer skills and social-media savvy. You dream of sitting in your cozy cabin and writing pithy essays about important events. You look at advertisements or PR messages and say, "I could do better." You aspire to be the Next Big Thing in marketing or play-by-play sports or event planning or movie reviewing.

Whatever you dream of doing in journalism or strategic communications, this is where you start. Ours is a course in finding, gathering, and using information. That sounds so dry and boring, but this is a course in honing your curiosity, stoking your enthusiasm for finding answers, and building your confidence as a researcher, writer, whatever else you aspire to be. It's about figuring out where to go when you have questions, then figuring out what to do with the answers—once you've filled your recorder with interviews, your spreadsheet with data, and your notebook with ideas.

At its core, this is a class about questions. Only by crafting good questions can you find good answers. Only by using high-quality sources can you find high-quality information. With that in mind, I want you to be able to formulate questions that will help you think better, help you research better, and help you analyze information better. This isn't an exercise in philosophy—rather, it's a pursuit of knowledge, of better preparing yourself for a world awash in information both good and bad, in media both trusted and not, in resources of all kinds that you have to scrutinize if you hope to learn and act as a citizen, worker, and scholar. And along the way, I will do everything I can to help you.

Course goals

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand the forms and purposes of information.
- Ask questions that help you find and interpret information, and explain it clearly.
- Find information using libraries, research reports, organizations, databases, regulations, public records, experts, and non-experts.
- Critically evaluate information sources for credibility, accuracy, and completeness.
- Develop focused plans for research projects.
- Use a variety of digital and non-digital tools to research and present information.

Required materials and access

You need this book:

- Don MacLeod, *How to Find Out Anything* (Prentice Hall Press, 2012).

You also need:

- Access to Blackboard. All assignments will be posted there, and we will use it for grades and instructional videos.
- To be classy and fabulous.
- A love of KU basketball.

Class format

Think of yourself as a consultant to a news or strategic communications organization (a news station, a branding agency, etc.). That's the role you'll play all semester (the least sexy form of roleplaying, I know) as we build toward the final project—to present your expertise about a particular topic to that organization. You'll recommend information and sources that the organization should use regarding that topic, as well as sources the organization should avoid.

Each assignment is designed to help you find information about your topic, evaluate the information's credibility, and effectively present it. So your first task is to select the topic you want to be an expert on. You'll select it in the first two weeks of class and stick with it for the remainder of the semester. Really try to find something that interests you and piques your curiosity. I'm happy to help you identify a topic, and the first 10 pages of the MacLeod book may help you, too.

Attendance and electronic devices

Attendance is mandatory. You get one unexcused absence, and otherwise I reserve the right to lower your final grade for repeated unexcused absences. If you're eligible for an excused absence (because of a documented illness, a religious observance, or a death in the family), email me in advance and be prepared to provide proper proof of the illness, observance, or death.

During class, you may **not** use any electronic device, including your cell phone, unless I've given you permission. Buzzkill, I know. Tinder must wait, and so must your roommate who's texting you about getting turned up at the Hawk. I reserve the right to lower your final grade for the unauthorized use of electronic devices during class.

Assignments and grading

We'll use many learning approaches in this class, and I want you to do well—and I'll help you in every way I can. Importantly, this is not a class where you can sit back at the start of the semester and hope to make up for lost ground at the midterm or in the second half of the semester. You really need to remain engaged week to week if you want to do well.

Total points available: 410. They'll come from three sources:

1) *Assignments: 250 points total (50 points each)*

- Five throughout the semester.

2) *News posts: 60 points total (20 points each)*

- Three throughout the semester.

3) *Final project: 100 points total*

- There is no final exam. This is the grand finale.

Important: Journalism majors must receive a grade of C or better in this class to advance to other courses in the school. A grade of C- or lower means the student must retake the course.

Extra credit: At my discretion.

Late work and grade concerns: Late work will not be accepted. Also, although grades are not negotiable, I'm happy to hear out any concern you have about a grade, as long as the concern is promptly brought to my attention. That means if you have a concern about a grade, you must bring it to my attention within a week of receiving that grade.

Pluses and minuses denote variations in quality within a letter grade, and generally:

- The grade of A will be reported for achievement of outstanding quality.

- The grade of B will be reported for achievement of high quality.

- The grade of C will be reported for achievement of acceptable quality.

- The grade of D will be reported for achievement that is minimally passing, at less than acceptable quality.

- The grade of F will be reported for achievement that is poor and not passing.

Letter Grade	Percentage Points
A+	100 – 97
A	96.9 – 93
A-	92.9 – 90
B+	89.9 – 87
B	86.9 – 83
B-	82.9 – 80
C+	79.9 – 77
C	76.9 – 73
C-	72.9 – 70
D+	69.9 – 67
D	66.9 – 63
D-	62.9 – 60
F	Below 60

Academic misconduct

In this class, and in all journalism classes, honesty and integrity are critical. Any work you do must be original and reflect your own ideas, thoughts, and research. In a work setting, if you violate professional standards, you'll be fired. In this class, if you violate academic integrity standards, you'll fail the assignment and possibly the course. Also, you may be expelled from, or denied admission to, the School of Journalism. You must comply with the university policies governing academic misconduct set out in the Student Handbook.

Tentative schedule

Week 1: Jan. 18

Get to know one another, play heads up seven up, discuss course.

Week 2: Jan. 23

The information society.

Week 3: Jan. 30

Media and information policy.
[Submit topic. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 4: Feb. 6

Searching and aggregating, becoming an advanced Googler.
[News post 1 due. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 5: Feb. 13

Public data.
[News post 2 due. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 6: Feb. 20

Public data, continued.
[Assignment 1 due: FOIA request. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 7: Feb. 27

Nonprofit organizations.
[News post 3 due. Date and time TBA.](#)

Week 8: Mar. 6

Nonprofit organizations, continued.
[Assignment 2 due: Nonprofit. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 9: Mar. 13

Scholarly and survey research.

Week 10: Mar. 20

SPRING BREAK, GET WEIRD

Week 11: Mar. 27

Scholarly and survey research, continued.
Also: For-profit organizations.
[Assignment 3 due: Scholarly/Survey. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 12: Apr. 3

For-profit organizations, continued.
[Assignment 4 due: For-profit. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 13: Apr. 10

Interviewing.

Week 14: Apr. 17

Interviewing, continued.

Week 15: Apr. 24

Ethics.
[Assignment 5 due: Interviewing. Date/time TBA.](#)

Week 16: May 1

Synthesis.

Week 17: May 8

Final exam week.
[Final project due. Date/time TBA.](#)