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**INF 380C: Information in Social and Cultural Context**

School of Information

University of Texas at Austin

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Lynn Westbrook, Associate Professor

512/232-7831, office; 512/471-8285, fax

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Required text:

We have no required textbook for this course; all the readings are in our Canvas site.

Official course description:

Examines the role of information in human activities, particularly in relation to particular social and cultural contexts. Examines how individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and society at large create, find, use, understand, share, transform, and curate information.

General objectives:

Through the activities in this class we will examine the role of information in human activities, particularly how it shapes and is shaped by the social and cultural context. Students will consider how creating, finding, using, understanding, sharing, transforming, and curating information impacts and is affected by the social and cultural contexts of individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and society at large. There is no essential piece of information or theory that every student must learn in a core class in the iSchool, but it is important that students have a general understanding of the ways in which information scholars study information and information technologies in social and cultural context.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

* employ a common language and the Information Life Cycle (ILC) framework in connecting the diverse areas of  specialization within the information field;
* critically examine the role of information in human activities as framed by social and cultural contexts;
* discuss the primary ways in which groups, organizations, and institutions employ in the ILC (i.e., create, find, use, understand, share, transform,  and curate) at micro and  macro levels; and
* engage in the reflective, critical inquiry essential to graduate level oral and written work.

Course format

Our semester is divided into four modules with two-three classes in each module.

* Values and epistemology
* Information policy
* Information institutions
* Information work and workers

In general, our in-class work will be sparked by the discussion questions and critical examples you post (15% of the grade) with attendance and participation (20%). In the second half of the semester you will lead an activity (10%) and post a synthesis of a day’s work (10%, shared with 1-2 partners). Finally, you will work in a team to complete a project, with 15% as an individual grade and 30% (25% + 5%) as a group grade.

Participation is at the core of this class. The activities, lectures, and discussions require full-tilt engagement. Questioning your own assumptions, values, and expectations is just as important as sharing your analysis, experiences, and ideas. Each evening we will work in small groups, teams, and as a whole to discuss and debate the conceptual frameworks for information engagement. Our readings are a launching point for this work and we will take our discussions much further.

In the first class we’ll talk about reading articles and participating in discussions and debates, including different useful roles that participants can take. In-class participation is absolutely required and there are other ways to participate through contributing to the full class discussions (see below).

Preparation for each class meeting

*Post your discussion questions:* By 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before each class, read the assigned material thoroughly through personal, social, and cultural prisms. Post a discussion question (with a brief explanation or elaboration) that addresses a theme you find in most of the readings; look for that which is worth discussing, such as gaps in reasoning or segments you find confusing. Perhaps an article raises new questions for you or you’d like to look into implementing the ideas in a particular context. Synthesis and synergy across readings are keys to successful questions. Before class, examine your colleagues’ questions and be prepared to discuss them in class. Your reactions to and insights on the readings will generate our discussions; their ability to do so is the grading criterion.

*Post your critical example:* By 5:00 pm on the Tuesday before each class, identify an example of the reading(s) currently in action. This critical example may pertain to one or more readings or to a theme/question the readings inspire. (Your question and example may pertain to the same idea.) Most of us have experienced information interactions that bring these ideas to life. Ten minutes with the news (e.g., web sites of PBS or BBC) may show you the implications and even outcomes of our course material. Find examples that push the boundaries of personal, social, or cultural norms – that which inspires discussion of its “appropriate” use.

*Move between the concrete and the abstract*: An information experience is concrete – that’s useful when it helps clarify explanations of a complex idea. A review of the implications of that experience is abstract – that’s useful when it helps contrast and compare socio-cultural information structures. Be prepared to do both.

*Feel free to expand on the postings*. Read something not required for class. Frame your reaction in terms of another class’ readings. Although not required, responses to questions or commentary posted by a colleague may be of use. Take whatever approach you find worthwhile in deepening our in-class discussions.

**Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments**

**Date Topic/assignment Readings**

8/28 Course structure; conceptual overview; ILC no readings

Establish synthesis post schedule

**MODULE I: Values and epistemology**

9/4 Information and personal identity Barker, Feinberg,

Groups established Fleischmann, Floridi,

Turkle (2011)

9/11 Information and collective identity Ackland, Bell, Frost,

Group work Oudshoorn,Veinot

9/17 Information in international context Aspray, Castells, James,

Establish activity schedule Kolko, Warschauer

Group work

**MODULE II: Information policy**

9/25 Standardization Bates 2006, Fish, Olson,

*Group proposal due* Renear, Star & Lampland

10/2 Intellectual property Dryden, Howison,

Jenkins, Lessig, Moore

10/9 Privacy and surveillance Blanchette, Doty,

Group work Dourish, Goodman, Lease

**MODULE III: Information institutions**

10/16 Libraries Immroth, Kinney, Roy,

Westbrook, Zhang

10/23 Archives Carter, Galloway,

Group work Manoff, O’Meara, Trace

10/30 Museums and Parks Bennett, Kidd, Marty,

Neufeld, Palmer

**MODULE IV: Information work and workers**

11/6 Professional ethics ACM, ALA (Code of

Group work Ethics), ALA (Values of

Librarianship), SAA,

SLA, Balsamo, Beghtol,

Budd

11/13 Roles for information professionals Bailey, Bias, Clement,

Dillon, Xie

11/20 Invisible work Anderson, Bates, Shapin,

Group work Star & Strauss, Suchman

*Individual project report*

11/27 no class – Happy Thanksgiving break

12/4 *Group project presentations* No readings

*Group project reports*

**Assignment Overview**

The assignments are derived directly from the course objectives below. Do *not* ask another student if you have a question – ask me. Most questions should be posted in our homework discussion board forum where others can benefit from your query.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

* employ a common language and the Information Life Cycle (ILC) framework in connecting the diverse areas of  specialization within the information field;
* critically examine the role of information in human activities as framed by social and cultural contexts;
* discuss the primary ways in which groups, organizations, and institutions employ in the ILC (i.e., create, find, use, understand, share, transform,  and curate) at micro and  macro levels; and
* engage in the reflective, critical inquiry essential to graduate level oral and written work.

Overview of assignments, grade percentages, and due dates

* Class attendance and participation, 20%, includes every class meeting
* Discussion questions, 10%, each class for which readings are assigned
* Critical examples, 10%, each class for which readings are assigned
* Interactive activity, 10%, date will be chosen on 9/18
* Synthesis, 10%, (grade shared with 1-2 partners), date will be chosen on first day
* Group project with individual report
  + Project proposal, 5% (grade shared with group), 9/25
  + Individual report, 15% (individual grade), 10/30
  + Group report (10%) and presentation (10%) (shared with group), 12/4

Late discussion posts will not receive credit. Students who anticipate difficulties with completing assignments on time should consult with the instructor as soon as possible.

* Class attendance and participation, 20%, includes every class meeting
  + What: Make cogent, substantive contributions to class and group discussions; question assumptions in the readings; extend your colleagues’ contributions through additional analysis and questioning.
  + Why: We are addressing fundamental questions and issues of our amorphous discipline. Working in isolation undercuts the complexities of these socio-cultural perspectives. Everyone’s life experiences and perspectives encourage us to push the boundaries of our intellectual comfort zones. Therefore, this course requires vigorous, invested participation in group/full class discussions and activities.
  + How: Be thoroughly prepared for each class with your own notes on each reading and what you see as the connections among them. Read your colleagues’ postings before class; be ready to explain the value you see in particular perspectives.
  + Grading criteria: Everyone starts with 200 points; minimalist participation reduces them. Missing class for any reason (other than that in University policy) costs 100 points; missing an additional class further reduces the overall grade by 100 points. See class policy on attendance for more details.
  + TIPS: I’m likely to ask you to share your questions or commentary with the class at large or in a group. Be ready to explain, not simply read, them. Why do they matter? Elaborate and explicate.
* Discussion questions, 10%, each class for which readings are assigned
  + What: Post a discussion question that addresses a theme which spans multiple readings. Include a brief explanation or elaboration to contextualize your choices.
  + Why: Most of us have experienced information interactions that bring these ideas to life so we have sense of the complexities involved. Developing critical reading skills and intellectual curiosity are essential for success in the information field and in this course. These discussions contribute to all four of our course objectives.
  + How: Read the assigned material thoroughly through personal, social, and cultural prisms. Look for that which is worth discussing, such as gaps in reasoning or ideas you find confusing. Perhaps an article raises new questions for you or you’d like to look into implementing the ideas in a particular context. Post each question in the appropriate Canvas venue.
  + Grading criteria: Effective, challenging questions/examples that spark and expand our discussions. (Your question and example may pertain to the same idea.)
  + TIPS: Synthesis and synergy across readings are keys to successful questions. Explicitly refer to and synthesize multiple readings.
* Critical examples: 10%, each class for which readings are assigned
  + What: Identify an example of the reading(s) from everyday life. This critical example may pertain to one or more readings or to a theme/question the readings inspire. Include a brief explanation or elaboration to contextualize your choices.
  + Why: Considering the rich chaos of current information practice from the perspectives of our course, supports the analytic practice so essential in our field. These examples contribute to all four of our course objectives.
  + How: Read the assigned material identify an example pertaining to multiple readings. Find examples that push the boundaries of personal, social, or cultural norms – that which inspires discussion of its “appropriate” use. Post each example in the appropriate Canvas venue.
  + Grading criteria: Effective, challenging questions/examples that spark and expand our discussions. (Your question and example may pertain to the same idea.)
  + TIPS: Ten minutes with the news (e.g., web sites of PBS or BBC) may show you the implications and even outcomes of our course material.
* Interactive activity, 10%, date will be chosen on 9/17
  + What: With your 1-2 colleagues, working as a team, create and lead an engaging activity that furthers our understanding of the day’s material.
  + Why: This assignment requires you to move from the reflective thinking of our question/example discussions into active application of the material.
  + How: During the first few weeks of class you’ll see several of these activities used in our work. Get together and lay out a carefully planned activity with a clear goal, supportive materials as appropriate (e.g., realia, a pecha kucha presentation). Open your activity firmly, close with a tight summary, and keep our minds going at all times.
  + Grading criteria: This team activity should take 30-40 minutes, require your colleagues’ judgment, challenge our actual practice as professionals. Solid preparation (e.g., know how to use the equipment, have a tight structure) and professional execution are essential.
  + TIPS: Be creative – push the boundaries of class engagement by doing outside reading beyond the syllabus. Coordinate with your team members over several weeks to ensure you’ll be able to produce a coherent and dynamic interactive activity.
* Synthesis of a day’s work, 10%, (shared with 1-2 partners), date will be chosen on first day
  + What: A substantive and concise summary of the day’s key insights, conclusions, challenges, and other memorable outcomes.
  + Why: This assignment requires you to check your experiences and understanding with someone else, that is – to look at our shared class experience through a colleague’s filters. It’s both a way to actually do what we’re talking about and a way for everyone in the class to develop a set of carefully crafted statements for future reference. Your colleagues will review your post as part of their group work.
  + How: Get together with the colleague(s) you’ll be working with and lay out an approach to taking notes on the day’s work. A structured approach in which each of you has a different focus is usually productive. You’re responsible for the whole class so feel free to gather up any handouts, PPT presentations, or other extant documents you find helpful. As a pair/trio, write a single 1-3 page synthesis using whatever process works for everyone. Use charts, diagrams, bullet lists, and/or text. Post this synthesis on the appropriate discussion.
  + Grading criteria: The assignment requires a *synthesis*, not a record of events or data dump. The format may be informal but the document should be proofed. (If you’d like to post a presentation of some sort, let me know so we can work it out. Something other than a document would be excellent!)
  + TIPS: Submit what you’d like to read/see. If you’d like to keep it as a review or inspiration, then it’s probably ready to post.
* Group project
  + What: The project proposal involves deciding on a group, organization, or institution to study, and articulating the social and cultural context for information in that group, organization, or institution. The individual report involves writing your own report on how the cultural and social context of your study group, organization, or institution impacts the aspect of the information lifecycle you have proposed to study. The final report should provide a comprehensive overview of the information lifecycle within the context of your selected group, organization, or institution’s social and cultural context, including providing answers for all questions from the individual report. The final presentation is an opportunity to share your collaborative work with the entire class.
  + Why: Projects combine teamwork with individual accountability, and include a project proposal, individual report, final report, and final presentation.
  + How: In our first class meeting, we will form teams with 5-6 students per team. You will work with your team throughout the semester on your interactive activity, project proposal, final report, and final presentation. This assignment has 3 group components and 1 individual component. Directions are laid out below in the chronological order in which you’ll work.
    - Project Proposal: Due 9/25, this group item focuses on the different information life cycle stages: create, find, use, understand, share, transform, and curate. Submit a two-page proposal addressing:
      * What group, organization, or institution have you decided to study?
      * Why have you selected this group, organization, or institution?
      * What do you expect are the social and cultural context for this organization?
      * What is their mission or goal?
      * On which 4-6 stages of the information life cycle will your team focus?
      * Who will focus on which stage?
      * What approach will you use across stages and for each particular stage?
    - Individual Report: Due 10/30, this individual item should be 6-9 pages in length and can be based on any kind of research, such as a literature review, interviews, or surveys. Please note that experience with research methods is not necessary, as you may elect to write a literature review. You should make sure to answer the following questions in your report:
      * How did you study your selected stage? Please be as detailed as possible.
      * What did you find? What were the findings of the literature review, interviews, surveys, or other research method you used?
      * What do you see as the organization’s social and cultural context?
      * What does it mean? What would you conclude based on your findings?
      * What can we learn from? What best practices used here can apply elsewhere?
      * What can be improved? Based on what you have articulated as the organization’s social and cultural context, how could the information they produce or use better serve them?
    - Final Report: Due 12/4, this group item requires everyone to work together closely to synthesize your individual reports into a coherent report. Begin with a 250 word executive summary and end with takeaways. This final group report should be 20-30 pages in length, and must be collaboratively written by all team members based on each team member's individual reports. Post the report in the appropriate discussion venue; use your executive summary as the posting text.
    - Final Presentation: Due 12/4, this group presentation will be 15 minutes in length, with an additional five minutes for questions and discussion. All team members must participate in both preparing and presenting this final presentation; a visual and a handout must be included. Post the visual and handout in the appropriate discussion venue; use a very brief description of the presentation as the posting text.
  + Grading criteria: All four items must be carefully proofed and professionally structured. The individual report may be in first person but the group items must be in third person. In each case, focus more on the analytic than on the descriptive. Write for your colleagues as though your report is part of their preparation for a critical job interview. Appropriate (i.e., not forced) references to readings, examples, and material in the synthesis posts may provide a more contextualized analysis.
  + TIPS: Carefully select an organization involved in creating, finding, using, understanding, transforming, sharing, and curating information. Develop a coherent theme across the different individual components of the report.

**Two-way feedback**

*Your feedback to me*

This course requires a willingness to take a large-scale overview of fundamental information studies concepts. You might, at times, want to focus closely on material that is concrete, applied, focused on a particular profession, or replete with technology. Electives will meet those interests; this course is, at heart, conceptual.

The conceptual can be slippery. We’ll certainly learn from each other constantly. Your information experiences will surprise some of your colleagues. Information studies, like all disciplines, has its own language and jargon.

If you’d like something specific or would just like to talk over the course material, then drop by during office hours. If that’s not convenient for you, then check with me in class and we’ll find a slot that works for you.

*My feedback to you*

Feedback can be formative or summative. *Formative feedback* is designed to strengthen quality and growth. Its sole function is to improve understanding and abilities. You give formative feedback when you coach a colleague who is learning how to use an unfamiliar piece of software. *Summative feedback* is designed to quantify performance. You give summative feedback when you complete a satisfaction survey at your dentist and rate the receptionist’s efficiency as 9 on a 10-point scale.

I use three means of giving you feedback, two are formative and one is summative.

* First, *one-to-one feedback* is available at any time in my office. This is particularly useful when you are working on an assignment – don’t wait till the grade is in. Bring in questions as you go along. I’d rather give you feedback early so you can make the most of it. The opportunity to have conversations about coursework is one of the many advantages of graduate school. Please – come to office hours frequently. (Make appointments

outside of office hours if the times aren’t working well for you.)

* Second, *formative in-class feedback* fits into the workflow and is, therefore, quite informal. Requesting elaboration of an idea, encouraging follow-up on a group discussion analysis, and questioning the application of a news story are all means of providing positive feedback. Worthwhile contributions become part of the day’s work and there’s no better feedback than support in

weaving your thoughts into the discourse.

* Finally*, grades* provide the most concrete form of feedback. Formative notes, suggestions, and explanations generally accompany my grades. If you’ve made good use of office hours and actively engaged in classroom work, then grades should be more a confirmation of your own self-assessment than an unanticipated summation.

Most of us are accustomed to pay primary attention to the summative feedback. For all intents and purposes, however, the summative is temporary. What matters is the formative.

**INF 380C Course Policies**

*You are responsible for reading and following these course policies. Please let me know at once if you have any questions on any of them.*

**The University of Texas Honor Code – see our site and the UT site for this**

Please note that matters of academic integrity are taken seriously in this course. Students who use, quote, or otherwise employ the ideas, words, and insights of others without appropriate attribution will ***fail the assignment and, possibly, the course***. When in doubt, ask immediately. Asking is the sign of an intelligent, thoughtful response to our complex world of layered information resources*.* Every student is required to take the plagiarism online tutorial [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/index.html] or assume responsibility for knowing its contents.

**University Electronic Mail Notification Policy**

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked twice daily, but at a minimum, daily. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>.

In this course e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your e-mail daily for class work and announcements. Please be certain that your email address in Canvas is correct at all times. You are the only one who can do this and it’s essential for course communication.

# **Documented Disability Support**

The University of Texas seeks to provide appropriate academic adjustments for all individuals with disabilities. This University will comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing appropriate academic adjustments to afford equal educational opportunity. It is the responsibility of the student to register with and provide medical verification and academic schedules to Services for Students with Disabilities at the beginning of each semester or as soon as the need arises. The student must contact the faculty member in a timely manner to arrange for appropriate academic adjustments. Students who require special accommodations need to get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259- voice or 471-4641 – TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). This letter should be presented to the instructor in each course at the beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be discussed at that time. Five business days before an exam the student should remind the instructor of any testing accommodations that will be needed. See this Web site for more information: [<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/providing.php>].

**Technology requirements**

The vast majority of this course will take place in-person with Canvas used primarily as a repository of discussion posts, supplements, and resources.

Canvas is available at <http://courses.utexas.edu>. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 Monday through Thursday 8 am to 8 pm as well as Friday and Saturday noon to 6pm. They are *closed* on Sundays.

In addition, you are required to have access to whatever technology is necessary for you to function well in this course. That includes Internet access that allows you to explore sites that might be blocked by some filters and sufficient memory to handle downloads and other course requirements. You can use any of the computer labs on campus and any other arrangement is acceptable so long as your own needs for connectivity and information access are met.

**Attendance**

Attendance constitutes 20% of your grade.

Because the vast majority of the learning in this class will occur within the classroom, you are required to attend class regularly. Attendance will be taken during each class period. Absences will only be excused in situations following university policy (illness, religious holy days, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling absences beyond your control) with proper documentation and timely notification (prior to class for non-emergencies). Excessive tardiness may be considered as an unexcused absence except in situations following university policy.

Class participation is a critical element of this course. The effectiveness of the course will be significantly impacted by the quality of your participation. Class participation is not merely attendance, but rather factors in your overall contributions to the collaborative learning environment, based on both the quantity and quality of your interactions in all aspects of the course. You are expected to participate in all aspects of class discussion. You should come to class prepared to discuss the required readings, as well as your perspectives on these readings. You should strive for balance in your contributions, and your participation will not be based on who speaks the loudest or the longest, but on consistent participation of significant quantity and, most importantly, quality.

Missing class for any reason (other than that in University policy) costs 100 points; missing an additional class further reduces the overall grade by 100 points.

Your class participation grade starts with the full 200 points; consistently high-quality contributions will keep that number as is. The grade will be lowered by deductions of 5-15 points for lack of or poor involvement with class work on an overall basis.

Please note that regular attendance and active participation in each class session are critical for receiving a good grade in this course. By actively participating in each class, you will receive a full letter grade higher than if you were to skip half of the classes or to be half-awake for all of the classes.

**Late assignment policy**

All assignments are due by the start of class for that week, except as noted in the course schedule. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. Late assignments will only be excused in situations following university policy (illness, religious holy days, etc.) with proper documentation and timely notification (prior to the deadline for non-emergencies). In all other cases, assignments received after the deadline will be penalized 10% per 24-hour period. If you are five days late, even an otherwise perfect assignment will only receive half-credit; and if you are ten days late, your assignment will not be graded and will not receive any credit.

**Grading**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | B+ | 87-89 | C+ | 77-79 | D+ | 67-69 |  |  |
| A | 93-100 | B | 83-86 | C | 73-76 | D | 63-66 | F | 0-59 |
| A- | 90-92 | B- | 80-82 | C- | 70-72 | D- | 60-62 |  |  |

**Communication**

I will make every effort to answer emails and phone calls *within 2 working days*. If you have not heard from me within that time, please let me know by an alternative form of contact so we can make sure there are no technical problems involved. If you leave me a voice mail, then it will also be sent to my email.

I will also make every effort to *grade and return assignments by the next class meeting*. If I have to cancel office hours, then I will note that on our Canvas announcement page along with the make-up time scheduled to replace the slot.

**Maintain work files**

Students are responsible for maintaining their own files of work, both submitted and returned, until official University grades are received. You are encouraged to keep these materials until graduation, as I may need some of it to compose a detailed and persuasive recommendation letter for you.

**Health and safety**

The University has a wide range of health and safety services available to all students. Please take full advantage of these support tools and let me know if you have questions about how to access what you need. Please be aware of your surroundings at all times. For more on personal safety and health, take a look at these resources:

* Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL) [http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal/]
* Stress management [http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/stress.html]
* Crime prevention [http://www.utexas.edu/police/prevention/]

**Style manual**

Learning to use one of the established style manuals supports development of professional writing skills. We will use the American Psychological Association’s style manual; see [http://www.apastyle.org/]. In particular, please be sure to follow its citation formats and rules on language bias.