

Class Syllabus

Descriptive Traditions in Cultural Heritage

Basic information

Instructor: Melanie Feinberg

Class location: UTA 1.204

Date and time: Wednesdays, 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Instructor information

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Office: UTA 5.446

Office phone: 512-471-8487

Office hours: Thursdays, 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

E-mail is the most reliable means of contact. I do my best to answer e-mail within a day or two of receipt. If you do not receive a response after a few days, please follow up. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with "INF 384M."

Introduction

This course comprises a critical, comparative examination of the concept of description and its institutionalization, in the form of metadata standards, rules, and formats, in three primary contexts: libraries, archives, and museums. We will investigate the conceptual foundations and goals of description in each context and the structures (guidelines, technologies) that have been developed to facilitate institutional goals.

We will also explore emerging challenges to traditional models of description, focusing on potential convergence of descriptive efforts in digital environments. We will examine initiatives to create integrative infrastructures across cultural heritage environments, and we will ponder the incorporation of "data" in cultural heritage collections as well as "documents." We will also think about the nature of description (that is, metadata) and the status of traditional distinctions between description and its object (that is, between metadata and data, or metadata and document).

The course will not emphasize the practice of creating descriptive metadata in any current environment (that is, you will not learn how to create library catalog records or archival finding aids according to existing content and technical standards). Instead, the course will focus on understanding and interrogating the conceptual foundations of existing standards and guidelines for such descriptions. We will emphasize rigorous and spirited analysis of these descriptive paradigms and their continued utility in a rapidly changing information landscape.

It may seem, on the surface, that such an examination is removed from everyday concerns of information professions. *Precisely the opposite is true.* Many of our course readings are written by professionals grappling with very complex, dynamic, and yes—conceptual issues; other "readings" are new and ongoing collection prototypes and platforms. Your ultimate value as an information professional is not in being able to create an archival finding aid, library catalog record, or museum database entry according to some existing standard. Your ultimate value lies in being able to comprehend the universe of various standards, in their conceptual alignments and conflicts, and in being able to select, adapt, and innovate

standards in a rapidly changing cultural heritage environment of convergence and aggregation. Your value also lies in perceiving the conceptual synergies between cultural heritage descriptive efforts and similar activities within both scientific and corporate domains. This course will set you on that path.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259. (Web site at <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>)

Academic integrity

I follow University of Texas standards for academic integrity, as documented on the Dean of Students' Web site and in associated materials. It is very important that academic work is conducted according to accepted ethical standards. If you uncertain whether an action is in keeping with academic integrity standards, please consult with me before undertaking it.

Assignments and Grading

There are three graded components to this course:

- Participation (35 points).
- Facilitation of one class discussion period (15 points).
- Final paper (50 points).

The final paper is due on Friday, December 5 (the last day of classes) at noon. Place a printed copy of your paper in my mailbox in the main office, UTA 5.526. Or, you can bring your paper to the last class on Wednesday, December 3, if you prefer.

Participation

The success of the course depends a great deal on each student's preparation, perspective, and willingness to engage the concepts in a constructive and critical way. Everyone is expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned articles, not just to understand what they mean, but to comment upon them, compare and evaluate ideas, and investigate the continued application of concepts in continually changing contexts. Reading the assignments is only the first step in preparation; students should consider their own positions relative to each article's argument and identify issues to pursue via group discussion.

In class, everyone needs to contribute ideas, questions, and perspectives. Respectful debate is encouraged. However, quantity is not the primary mark of successful participation. Students who make consistently thoughtful contributions, reference appropriate course readings, propel discussions onward, and listen attentively to the ideas of their colleagues will receive the highest participation grades.

While I do not have an attendance policy, the significance of the participation component requires that few classes be missed. If you foresee extensive absences, please consult with me. (However, individual absences do not require any notification or makeup work.)

Facilitation of discussion

All students will be responsible for facilitating one half of one class session (about one hour and fifteen minutes). Your job is to isolate themes from the readings and to focus the group's attention on those themes for productive discussion. In this manner, all seminar participants help to form our mutual inquiries, and we all contribute as fellow scholars.

This is not a presentation. Your goal is not to summarize the readings; your goal is to direct the discussion of concepts from the readings. It is your opportunity to direct the energies and intelligence of your colleagues toward issues of personal interest. This is a task that requires significant thought and preparation to develop appropriate questions, scenarios, examples, or activities to inspire and shape the course in a productive way. For example, you might have the class explore how some form of the archival concept of provenance might contribute to the integration of metadata records in a system such as Europeana, a service that coordinates the aggregation and standardization of cultural heritage data for the European Union. This exploration could take the form of a traditional discussion, or it could incorporate a design exercise (how would you do it?), or it could address various use cases or scenarios. It could involve the whole group, small groups, or individual components. The approach you take is up to you, and creativity is encouraged (but not required...a traditional discussion is perfectly acceptable if that's what you want to do). It is worthwhile to note, however, that more productive discussions tend to emphasize larger ideas and concepts, rather than details regarding particular remarks, and in general focus on the substance of the argument over matters of style.

A portion of the first class session will be devoted to strategies for successful discussion facilitation. You are welcome to visit office hours to discuss your plans for structuring your class session.

Research paper

You will write a research paper of 4,000 to 5,000 words (that's about 15-20 pages).

You will propose a paper topic that explores an issue related to description in significant depth. To adequately investigate your topic, you will likely need to incorporate both class readings and outside sources into your paper.

To be successful, your paper should advance an original argument regarding the topic. Providing evidence for your argument will undoubtedly require the synthesis of multiple sources, but the paper should not merely summarize the views of others. You will need to articulate and defend a position that extends the scholarship in the area you have chosen.

Here are some examples of topics to get you started thinking:

- To what extent do the descriptive goals of libraries, archives, and museums converge in the digital environment? If such convergence exists, how should these institutions respond?
- How should the potential aggregation and reuse of metadata be accounted for in descriptive practices? Are there any circumstances in which aggregation and reuse is ill-advised, or should open data always be the rule?
- What is the role of expertise in describing objects? What descriptive goals are served by the expertise of information professionals—and does the particular expertise of a librarian, an archivist, or a museum professional matter? In what ways might practices and artifacts of description help to negotiate between the goals of professionals and the goals of various user communities?
- Is cultural heritage data fundamentally different from scientific data? Is “cyberinfrastructure” a similar proposition for cultural heritage and for science?

In approaching such complex and potentially encompassing topics, it can be helpful to ground one's discussion in a particular case study, perhaps involving a specific system, collection, institution, document form, set of guidelines, and so on. One might, for example, approach the first question by exploring how one or several example objects (such as a group blog in current production) might be described according to the goals and standards of libraries, archives, and museums, and by proposing a

means through which a single description might equally facilitate each goal (or one might conclude that this is not possible and discuss the implications associated with that position, or one might use this example to investigate further the ways in which descriptive goals of different institutions do and do not align).

It is perfectly acceptable to incorporate professional experiences into a paper, although these will likely be the inspiration for a more scholarly investigation and not an end unto themselves.

Papers will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Clearly outlines the general topic and defines its scope. Narrows the topic as necessary to enable a persuasive argument within the paper's length constraints. Explains the topic's importance and context.
- Develops and communicates a clear and original perspective or position on the topic.
- Contextualizes the topic via concise yet comprehensive summary of existing research and practice, using course readings and outside sources as necessary. Cites others' work appropriately.
- Supports the perspective or position through careful consideration of evidence. Appropriate evidence may include assessment of previous research, analysis of examples from practice, and so on.
- Presents and evaluates conclusions and implications drawn from the presented position and evidence.
- Exhibits a systematic, organized document structure and clear argument progression.
- Communicates clearly and effectively, with proper grammar and spelling. Uses appropriate tone for scholarly work. Prose is concise and direct, without excess redundancy or ambiguity.

Paper preparation details

You may select whatever font, font size, margin, spacing, and other options that you like, as long as your paper is professionally presented. You may adopt any reasonable citation style, as long as you cite references as appropriate for scholarly work. I will not actually count the words in your paper; directions about length are guidelines only.

Paper progress markers

There will be four opportunities to share your progress on your paper in class.

On October 1, you will share initial thoughts on a topic with the entire group. Each person will spend a few minutes briefly describing ideas for a paper, with a few minutes for comments and questions. This will be a collaborative session to articulate initial ideas and generate new ones, with the goal of getting everyone thinking productively and concretely about potential paper topics.

We will repeat this on October 15, when each student will submit a 1-page proposal for your topic at the beginning of class. Your proposal should describe the general topic, sketch the projected scope of the paper, and summarize how you intend to pursue your investigation, with an initial set of sources identified. These proposals will not be graded; however, if you do not turn one in, a point will be deducted from your final paper grade. I will provide feedback on the proposals.

On November 19, you will share your interim progress with a small group in peer feedback sessions. Each group member will get 20-30 minutes to present ideas and receive comments from colleagues.

On December 3, you will present a final progress report on your paper to the class. This is not a formal presentation (no slides!); rather, it is a brief (five to ten minutes) summary of your ideas, your process, and your conclusions.

Grading Details

I will use the following schedule in calculating final grades:

A = 95-100	A- = 90-94	B+ = 84-89
B = 79-83	B- = 74-78	C+ = 69-73
C = 60-68	F = <60	

Calendar: Readings and Assignments

Note: Optional readings are exactly that. This extra material provides additional nuance to the week's topics for those with time and interest.

You can refer to optional readings in class discussions if you are the facilitator, but you need to assume that no one else has read them. (That is, you will need to explain the material to everyone else before you ask people to comment on it.)

Date	Themes	Readings
Week 1 August 27	Introduction to the course Introduction to facilitation; select slots for leading discussion	Given and McTavish Clement, Hagenmeier, and Knies
Week 2 September 3	Libraries: Conceptual foundations	Cutter (11-55; the rest is optional) Lubetzky (1-57; the rest is optional) Svenonius <i>Optional</i> Tillett Wilson
Week 3 September 10	Libraries: Current models (FRBR and RDA)	Oliver, Ch. 1, 3, 5 RDA selections (online) Furner <i>Optional</i> Riva and Oliver IFLA, FRBR report
Week 4 September 17	Libraries: Challenges and changes	Hoffman Theimer Diao and Hernandez White Palmer, Weber, Munoz, and Renear <i>Optional</i> Rose Allison-Cassin
Week 5 September 24	Archives: Conceptual foundations	Cook McNeil (1994) <i>Optional</i>

Date	Themes	Readings
		McNeil (1995) Haworth Duchein Bearman and Lytle
Week 6 October 1	Archives: Current models (DACS) <i>Student paper ideas 1</i>	SAA (selections) Rush, et al Trace and Dillon <i>Optional</i> Pitti
Week 7 October 8	Archives: Challenges and changes	Yakel et al Liew Bak SNAC project (http://socialarchive.iath.virginia.edu/) BitCurator project (http://www.bitcurator.net/) Optional Yakel (2011)
Week 8 October 15 <i>Turn in 1-page proposal for paper topic</i>	Museums: Conceptual foundations <i>Student paper ideas 2</i>	Marty, Rayward, and Twidale Bearman Orna and Pettit Gurian
Week 9 October 22	Museums: Current models (CCO/CDWA)	Baca (2006) selections Coburn et al <i>Optional</i> Harpring
Week 10 October 29	Museums: Challenges and changes	Getty Online Scholarly Cataloging Initiative (OSCI) interim report (pp. 1-36; the rest is optional) Cameron Dalton Kreps <i>Optional</i> Neely and Quigley
Week 11 November 5	<i>Melanie at ASIS&T conference</i> <i>No class session</i>	Start working on your paper, and start looking at Europeana and the DPLA.
Week 12 November 12	Integrative infrastructures: Europeana (cultural heritage data for Europe) and Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)	browse Europeana (don't forget Europeana Professional) browse the DPLA Europeana white paper #2: the problem of the yellow milkmaid Europeana strategy 2015-2020

Date	Themes	Readings
		Agenjo, Hernandez, and Viedma <i>Optional</i> Gregory and Williams Europeana business plan 2014
Week 13 November 19	Integrative infrastructures: archeological data <i>Student paper peer feedback</i>	Faniel, Kansa, Whitcher Kansa, Barrera-Gomez, and Yakel Atici, Whitcher Kansa, Lev-Tov, and Kansa Opencontext.org
Week 14 November 26	<i>Thanksgiving</i> <i>No class session</i>	
Week 15 December 3	Integrative infrastructures: digital humanities (ARC) <i>Student paper final progress reports</i>	Browse ARC sites: Nines, 18thConnect, MESA Kirschenbaum Wheeles

Readings

All readings are available in Canvas.

Complete bibliography

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- Europeana. Available at <http://europeana.eu/> (Europeana professional at <http://pro.europeana.eu/>)
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