

## Introduction to Information Studies

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Dr. Blaha  
Unique Number 27030  
Fall 2019

### Syllabus

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The syllabus for 304D includes goals for the course, the grading policy, an overview of assignments, and a list of writing tips and resources you may find helpful. If, at any time throughout the semester, you have questions about the syllabus, please contact your instructor for clarification.

### Contact

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**Instructor:** Craig Blaha  
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**Email:** (please contact me using Canvas) [craig.blaha at utexas.edu](mailto:craig.blaha@utexas.edu)  
**TA:** TA Pool Email: [ta\\_pool@ischool.utexas.edu](mailto:ta_pool@ischool.utexas.edu)

### Course Goal

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This course will introduce students to the field of information studies. Students will explore the foundations of the field, professions in the field, and issues within those professions.

This course carries the **Writing Flag**. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor and TAs to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one of your essays, and you will be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion (60%) of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

**Prerequisite:** none.

### Course Objectives

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Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of major topics, identify key issues, and discuss important terms in information studies
- Examine numerous perspectives related to professions and issues in information studies and formulate independent arguments based on these perspectives
- Relate perspectives and issues in information studies to both their personal and professional lives
- Fulfill the university requirements of a writing flag course

### Course Materials

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INF 304 does not have a textbook or course packet. Instead, all readings will be available through the course Web site, Canvas, UT's Library, or through the World Wide Web.

This course is a web-based course, so students will need regular access to the following materials:

- **Internet** – If you do not have access to a personal computer, you may use the iSchool lab ([UTA 1.210](#)) while enrolled in this course. You do not need to sign up for an iSchool account. The iSchool lab has both Macs and PCs, as well as lots of great software. I encourage you to check out the lab!
- **Email** – You can open an email account through UT, Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc. if you do not already have one. Make sure you register your official email account with the university. All correspondence for this course will use your official UT email, and "I didn't get the email" is not accepted as an excuse for missing an assignment!
- **Microsoft Word** – You will submit essays as Microsoft Word documents. The Campus Computer Store sells software, including Microsoft Office, to UT students and faculty at a discount. Since your written work will receive considerable feedback, only Microsoft Word documents will be accepted. I love open source software, but in order to provide feedback in a timely manner I need everyone to use Word.
- **Adobe Acrobat Reader** – Several articles we will read are in .pdf format so you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader (you most likely already have it).
- **UT Box** – UT offers you unlimited storage for your files and make them available to you anywhere. All you need is an Internet connection and a Web browser. Set up UT Box synch and keep your local files backed up to the cloud automatically! As a student, you have already paid for this service. Use it! Set up an account with your UTEID.

## Course Format

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This course is Web-based, so there are no class meetings. The course is divided into modules, and each week two new modules will be released. You can do the work whenever you want throughout the week as long as you submit everything no later than the designated date and time for each assignment. I recommend setting up a few 3-hour time blocks each week that will help you keep up with the class.

Each week I will release a new module (or two) that will focus on one topic within information studies. Each module will be composed of the following activities:

- **Online lecture** - Each module begins with an online "lecture." Read each lecture before proceeding to the assigned readings. While reading, take notes on questions you might have, interesting points made by the author, or concerns you may have related to the topic.
- **Readings** – There are citations provided at the beginning of each module, and all readings are available through the course Web site, Canvas, UT Library Online, or through the World Wide Web. See the "Course Materials" section for more information.
- **Discussion** – Students will engage in discussions about the lecture, readings, and/or related topics each week using the discussion board section set up by the instructor. You will find more information on discussions in the "Assignments" section of this syllabus.
- **Quiz** – an open book review of what we covered that week.

In addition, students will write four essays which are described in the “Assignments” section below.

### Grading Policy

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304 uses the traditional UT Austin undergraduate grading scale:

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|-----|--|
| A   | 94 - 100   |
| A - | 90 - 93  |
| B + | 87 - 89  |
| B   | 83 - 86  |
| B - | 80 - 82  |
| C + | 77 - 79  |
| C   | 73 - 76  |
| C - | 70 - 72  |
| D+  | 67 - 69  |
| D   | 63 - 66  |
| D-  | 60 - 62 (minimum for pass/fail students to pass) |
| F   | Below 60   |

The course grade is divided into three different assignment groups: discussions, quizzes, and the work related to your essays. The weight of each of these groups is described below, and the groups will be described in more detail in the “Assignments” section below:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Discussions: | 20% |
| Quizzes:     | 20% |
| Essays:      | 60% |

Each essay must be turned in to pass the class. If you do not turn in any one of the essays, including the last essay which is a substantial revision of one of your earlier essays, you will receive an F in the class, regardless of the grade Canvas displays. You might as well turn them in on time and earn some points! You can turn in an essay late in order to pass the class, but you will not receive points for late submissions.

Grades for essays, quizzes, participation, and weekly discussions will be posted in Canvas. You will need your UT EID and password to log in. I usually have each assignment that was submitted by the deadline graded within a week, and essays graded within two weeks, so you should be able to keep up with your score on a regular basis. If you have any questions about your grades at any point, definitely let me know!

### Late Grading:

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All work is due before the deadline listed on the due date. Late discussions will not be graded. No exceptions.

Canvas records the exact time you upload, so make sure you give yourself plenty of time for the document to upload before the deadline. I will use Canvas' recorded time as the official submission time. If the deadline is midnight and Canvas lists 12:01 AM as the time you uploaded your assignment and marks it late, then you will not receive credit.

No essays will be accepted **for a grade** after the deadline except in the case of a verifiable medical emergency. If you do miss the deadline, you will still need to turn in an

acceptable essay to pass the class! A computer virus, a computer crash, athletic events, and thunderstorms are not verifiable medical emergencies.

There is no final exam for this class.

## Assignments

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### Discussions

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This semester will include a discussion for each module as well as an occasional discussion for different essays, depending on what the class might be struggling with. For some discussions, Canvas will divide the class into a number of randomly assigned discussion groups. Discussions will be graded on a 4-point scale; two points for your original submission and one point for each of your responses to two other students. You must complete all three parts of the submission (original post and two responses) and meet the minimum requirements to receive credit. If you submit a great original post and only respond to one peer, you can only earn three points.

**2 Points:** For most original discussions, your submission should be at least 200 words long and make it clear to the instructor or TA that you have read the assigned reading for that week. Detailed instructions are listed on each discussion assignment.

**2 Points:** In addition, students must respond to the submissions of two other students. These responses should be at least two sentences long and should move the conversation forward. Responses of "I agree. This happened to me once." or similar short responses will not receive credit. Maximum effort!

Remember that these word limits are articulated in order to help you understand the minimum amount of effort required to avoid failing. They don't represent the minimum effort required to get an A!

### Quizzes

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Each module also includes a quiz to help you review what we discussed in that module and in the assigned reading. Quizzes are open book, so consider them more of a review than a "test of knowledge". Quizzes time out after 3 hours, so set aside an appropriate amount of time to work through the quiz.

The first essay module will discuss the writing conventions and process I expect from you in this course. Not all of the information in this section will be new to everyone, but I hope that each of you will get something out of this section.

This module will also discuss plagiarism. I know you are each already familiar with how to avoid plagiarism, but please be extra cautious in this class. Every semester I have had students fail the class, receive zeros, and be referred to Student Judicial Services for including content from other sources without proper citation. The process of finding, documenting, and referring students who plagiarize takes a TON of my time, and I would rather spend that time working with students to improve their writing than working with you to create a black mark on your permanent academic record. Avoid plagiarism and we will both enjoy the class more!

### Essays

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Students will complete four essays throughout the semester. Each essay will be evaluated using the traditional undergraduate letter grade scale listed above (A – F). Writing your essay at the last minute usually results in a poor grade. Each essay is intended to help you focus on a different writing skill while reviewing the course material. The first

essay will focus on using evidence to support your argument, the second on structuring your paper, and the third on grammar and general writing skills.

For the first essay, for example, 80% of your grade will be based on whether you include two well formatted APA quotations and two well formatted citations that use paraphrasing. The other 20% I will determine by the quality of your writing according to these criteria:

1. Grammar and spelling
2. The clarity of thought demonstrated in your essay
3. Your use of resources (including citation)
4. The structure of the essay and how well you followed writing conventions
5. The overall quality of the essay

The first two essays will include a research/preparatory step, the submission of your draft, and a peer review component. The third essay only includes a draft submission; no preparatory step or peer review. The fourth essay is a substantial revision of one of your other three essays, using the feedback from your peers, the TAs, and me.

In addition to these steps, your essay will be sent through Turnitin. I STRONGLY encourage you to review the Turnitin score and address any issues before the submission is due. I use the Turnitin score as an indicator of potential problems; Turnitin will highlight what it thinks are problematic areas, and I typically take a closer look and decide if I agree. If you choose not to review these highlighted areas and either leave a note explaining why it isn't a problem or to make a change and address the issue, you run the risk of failing the assignment and receiving a referral to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity. Most people never have a problem with this, but use the tool to your advantage to help you avoid plagiarism!

### *Essay Topics*

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The essay topics are selected to encourage you to synthesize the materials in the modules. My hope is you will reflect on what you learned in each group of modules, and build on those ideas to develop an essay that addresses the prompt. The prompt is designed to get you thinking about the topic, but I hope you will take your own personal experiences, undergraduate major, and future career goals to decide how to take the information in the modules and make it more interesting to you (and me!)

1. First Essay Prompt: Information and communication technology (ICT) is a term used to describe the variety of different tools we use to communicate with each other. These tools include mobile devices, laptops, the Internet and everything the Internet makes possible from social media to self-driving cars. Why is information and communication technology important now and into the future?
  - a. The main goal of this essay is for you to demonstrate your skill in using evidence to support an argument. I often see student essays that talk about "the explosion of the Internet" or how we can learn anything at "the touch of a button" (avoid both of these expressions!). What these students really mean to do is to offer specific examples of the number of people who have Internet access now as compared to ten years ago, or to discuss the reliability of information you can find from a specific source, such as Wikipedia, and both the positive and negative aspects of that easy access. Essay 1 will focus on using evidence to "show" your reader that something is true rather than "tell" your reader it is true.

- b. The essay 1 module tells you how to cite outside sources as well as the how to cite the course modules both in text and in your reference page, so make sure you pay attention to that information!
  - c. Essay 1 will include a peer review component.
- 2. Second Essay Prompt: Why is the organization, management, preservation, and access to information important?
  - a. Essay two helps you focus on the structure of your essay. The use of introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as the appropriate use and construction of paragraphs are the main goals of this essay.
  - b. Use the Librarianship, Archives and Preservation, Museums and Conservation, and Records Management modules as the foundation of your essay. You do not need to cite or refer to all of them, but your writing should reflect a synthesis of the ideas in these modules.
  - c. Feel free to use any current events, personal experiences, or other ideas to make this essay your own. The prompt allows you to use a number of different lenses. For example; are the activities listed in the prompt important to a functioning democracy, business success, a professional sports organization, cultural heritage, or fighting oppression? Any one of these topics should give you plenty of material to discuss in five pages, and there are a lot of other possible directions to take this essay.
  - d. Essay two will also be peer reviewed.
- 3. Third Essay Prompt: Your Choice
  - a. For the last essay, choose any topic we have touched on in class and examine this topic in depth. I encourage you to focus your investigation on a topic related to your major or to your future career. For example, in the past I have had students who heard about this “blockchain stuff” and used this essay as an opportunity to learn more about it, especially from a security and privacy point of view. I have also had students decide to conduct a competitive intelligence report on a company they were hoping to work for.
  - b. The third essay will focus on grammar, colloquialisms, ambiguous pronouns, and other language conventions. See the module for details on the language and tone I am looking for you to avoid in your essay.
  - c. As with essays one and two, use the modules as a foundation for your essay (citing appropriately), but feel free to include current events, information from your major, or anything else you find relevant or interesting.
- 4. Fourth Essay: Revision
  - a. Choose one of your earlier essays and revise it for a higher grade. Your revision should represent a substantial effort; it should be very easy for me to tell what changes you have made.

### *Essay Format*

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Remember to include a title page and bibliography for each essay. These pages DO NOT count toward the five-page minimum. Title pages should include your name, the date, the number and title of your essay, and the class number and section. Your essay must be submitted to Canvas as a word doc, and the file name needs to start with your last name. For example, my persuasive essay would be BlahaEssay1.doc. Without this title page and these naming conventions, your essay may not be graded! I typically download all of the essays and run them through the plagiarism checker, so an essay titled “essay2.doc” will get tossed

in the virtual circular file. A pdf will not be graded, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

You must cite **all** sources within the essay and provide complete citation information in a bibliography page, including any module readings or the online lecture. Students caught plagiarizing will suffer strict academic consequences. All citations should use APA format. For more information on APA, please see the Purdue University OWL guide: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

All essays will be submitted to Canvas and will be passed through Turnitin or another plagiarism check software. The results of this software analysis are not the only method I use to determine whether something is plagiarized. As I said earlier, plagiarism is my least favorite thing to deal with in this course. Avoid it!

The essay requirements include a five-page minimum, which means exactly that; if your essay is 4 ¾ pages long, you don't receive credit. If you expand the margins and increase the point size from the word defaults and more than double spaced in order to take up more space, you won't receive credit. Don't leave it up to me, write the full amount and make us both happy!

### *Essay Submission*

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Submit all assignments using Canvas. Assignments submitted via email will not be counted (I lose track of them – I get hundreds of emails a day, so I ask that you use Canvas both for communicating with me and submitting your assignments so we both have a record).

A tutorial for submitting documents is located here: <http://edutech.ctl.utexas.edu/submitting-assignments/>

All essays must be in Microsoft word format, saved as .doc or .docx. 11-point font (whatever the default is for Word, usually Cambria), double spaced with one-inch margins. I personally prefer open source software, but Canvas and Turnitin work best with Microsoft.

### *Peer Review*

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I will use the Canvas plugin Turnitin to pair you with another student for the first essay. Turnitin will have a series of questions for you to answer. For details, check the Turnitin web page for more information:

<https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/moodle/direct-v2/student/peermark/writing-a-peer-review.htm?Highlight=peer%20review>

This process is important because not only does it help your classmate improve their writing, but it also helps you improve your critical thinking and writing skills. More details on the specific expectations for each peer review will be included in each assignment.

The way Canvas handles peer-review does not allow for the reviewer to receive points for their effort (madness!). I will include a separate assignment called "Peer Review Points" (or something very similar) that does not allow you to submit anything. Please understand this is just for me to keep track of your peer review efforts in a transparent way – I want you to be able to see that you have earned these points, and to be able to contact me if you have any questions about your grade.

The details of the peer review process for the second essay is described in Canvas.

### *Resources*

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#### *Style Manuals*

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Students will need to cite all sources for their essays in APA format. Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) offers a great overview on how to do this. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl> Style manuals are located under Research and Citation.

### U.T. Writing Resources

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You are fortunate to attend the University of Texas, where you have access to one of the largest research libraries in the world! Take advantage of all the wonderful resources available through the U.T. system.

- Undergraduate Writing Center – located in FAC 211
- UT Library Online's (UT LOL) homepage – You can find library information, resources, and receive virtual assistance from a reference librarian!
- Full text articles and essays – Databases offering a plethora of articles and essays, available in both in HTML and .pdf format and from many disciplines
- Social Sciences Citation Index – An outstanding resource for finding articles and information on citation rates for many articles
- Databases arranged by subject – You can locate articles within specific disciplines.

### Other Writing Resources

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- The Citation Machine – A free Web site that can translate citation information into proper format for both APA and MLA style. A helpful and time-saving resource.
- Online Writing Lab – Purdue University provides an excellent online writing lab, including information about avoiding plagiarism, citing resources, and avoiding grammatical errors.

### University Policies

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#### Academic Integrity

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Please abide by the University's policy on academic integrity. All work you submit must be your own. "Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating and plagiarism... Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. University policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced." From: The University of Texas: General Information, Appendix C.

#### Special Needs

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The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To determine if you qualify, please contact the Dean of Students at 471-6259; 471-4641 TTY. If they certify your needs, we will work with you to make appropriate arrangements.

#### Religious or Holy Day Observance

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"A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence."

(<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi04-05/ch4/ch4g.html>)



## Email

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“Electronic mail (e-mail), like postal mail, is a mechanism for official University communication to students. The University will exercise the right to send e-mail communications to all students, and the University will expect that e-mail communications will be received and read in a timely manner.”

(<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi04-05/app/appn.html>). Both the instructor and the TA will reply to student emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends barring a rare and extenuating circumstance.

I look forward to working with you all this semester. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, do not hesitate to email me!