**INF 380C: Information in Social and Cultural Context**  
School of Information  
University of Texas at Austin  
Fall 2016; Wednesday 3-6, UTA 1.208

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**Required text:**  
No textbook is required for this course; all readings are in our Canvas site.

**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 societies create, find, use, understand, share, transform, and curate information.
Course objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. employ a common language and conceptual framework for connecting the diverse areas of specialization within the information field;
2. critically examine the role of information in human activities as framed by social and cultural contexts;
3. discuss the primary ways in which groups, organizations, and institutions employ information at micro and macro levels;
4. delineate relationships among forms of information work; and
5. engage in the reflective, critical inquiry essential to graduate level oral and written work.

Course format
Our semester is divided into three modules:
• Epistemology of information conceptual frameworks
• Information's role in human activity
• Information institutions and workers

Questioning your own assumptions, values, and expectations is just as important as sharing your analysis, experiences, and ideas.
# Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings/assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/24</td>
<td>Course structure; conceptual overview; basic analysis; research tools; presentation and writing expectations; form groups</td>
<td>no readings</td>
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</tbody>
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## MODULE I: Epistemology of information frameworks

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings/assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8/31</td>
<td>Established information engagement models</td>
<td>Agarwal, Bawden re Wilson, Lingel, Savolainen, Wilson re Bawden Wilson models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/7</td>
<td>Information design and individuals; critical analysis tools</td>
<td>Hyysalo, Turkle Oudshoorn, Okoli</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>Intellectual property; standardization; writing tools</td>
<td>Arendt, Mokhtar, Cervone</td>
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</tbody>
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## MODULE II: Information’s role in human activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings/assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/21</td>
<td>Information engagement actions; information literacy</td>
<td>Feldman, Ting, Mishra Context paper topic statement &amp; case study work plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/28</td>
<td>Information in personal and collective identity</td>
<td>Walter, Stokes, Resnick, Haraway</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>(Un)intended consequences</td>
<td>Salvadural, Henze, Heilbroner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Peer review of context paper topic statements &amp; group work on case study presentation</td>
<td>Context paper outline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MODULE III: Information institutions and workers

10/19  Information and social justice; global factors  Mathuews, Theocharis, Yuce, Xiao

10/26  Libraries  Abbott, Meier

11/2   Archives; museums  Anderson, Carter, Skov

11/9   Online institutions and communities  Cohen, Hulagabali, ibiblio site

11/16  Roles for information professionals; professional ethics  Alfino, Kuhn, Lazar
        Context paper

Conclusion

11/23  NO CLASS – Thanksgiving break  --

11/30  Case studies; course evaluations  Case study presentation; Context paper peer review
Overarching assignment criteria

Each of these two criteria form a significant part of the course grade. While they are common in graduate work, some students are given relatively little preparation for them.

1. Every prepared piece of written work must be completely accurate in terms of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and composition.
2. Every prepared piece of verbally delivered work must reflect thoughtful preparation in terms of content, organization, support, and delivery.

Grading

- Class preparation, 10% for each of 3 modules, 30% total
- Context paper, 55% total
  - 9/21, topic statement
  - 10/12, outline
  - 11/16, full paper
- Case study presentation, 15% total
  - 9/21, work plan and contribution determination
  - 11/30, full presentation

Do not ask another student about the homework – ask me.
Assignments

• Class preparation, 10% for each of 3 modules, 30% total; see Canvas for due dates
  1. *Reading question and/or response,* 75-100 words; address 2 or more readings. Question assumptions in the readings and their application in your own experience.
  2. *Discussion tool,* 2-3 sentence explanation of its relationship to 2 or more readings. Choose tools that will extend your colleagues’ understanding of the readings. Use such tools as the following:
     o links to real-life examples in *news* (such as this one on the right to control historical objects) or *history* (such as this one on presenting the ancient China’s terracotta warriors to a high-tech public)
     o instances of information that comes from *outside our discipline* (such as this one on biology’s visual information design)
     o *objects* that challenge our understanding of a cultural value (such as this one on creating information)
     o *statistics* (such as this one in which information trust is a concern)
     o *information creation* organs (such as this one in which information is a mechanism for socio-political parody)
     o *information context* situations (such as this one on two perspectives of the same action)
     o activities for us to do (such as a game of Jeopardy with the day’s ideas as the categories or Pictionary with information terms)
   Be fully prepared to apply your discussion tool.
  3. *Peer review,* Canvas assigns you 3 colleagues whose postings you will review each week. These reviews require only two numbers, no text.
     • (a) a rating for the reading question/response and
     • (b) a rating for the discussion tool.
   In each case, apply a rating of
     o 1 = top choice: want to see it as part of our class
     o 2 = acceptable: don’t mind seeing it as part of our class
     o 3 = unacceptable: do not want to see it as part of our class
   Your peer reviews are anonymous. Use any of the ratings on any of the postings even if it means using the same rating more than once on a particular day.
   • Grading criteria: Clearly explained reading posts and effectively presented discussion tools that challenge our understanding of the readings.
   • TIPS: Take 2 minutes to learn to use the presentation equipment in the classroom. We’ll use it for more than showing videos.
• Context paper, 55% total
  1. 9/21, topic statement, 5%: Identify an area, topic, or issue which you expect to encounter in your professional future. Explore the literature regarding its socio-cultural implications to get a firm hand on what you’ll be writing about. Post a 150-200-word explanation of your topic statement in Canvas.
  2. 10/12, outline, 5%: Post an outline of your paper with includes subheadings, a topic-sentence for each proposed paragraph, notations as to where major references will be used, and a reference list in APA format. After class, post the review form that you received from your colleague.
  3. 11/16, full paper, 45%: Post your final paper in Canvas with the abstract as the post’s text and the paper as an attached file.
     o Grading criteria: Refer to our work on writing expectations and our readings/discussions on socio-cultural perspectives.
     o Tips: Talk with me as quickly and as often as needed.

• Case study presentation, 15% total
  1. 8/24, form groups. In the coming days, begin to identify an example of an on-going incident in which an information phenomenon is embedded in a socio-cultural context(s).
  2. 9/21, have someone post your group’s work plan on Canvas, 3%. Determine the timeline on which the group will work and identify the individual responsible for each piece of that work.
  3. 11/30, post the group’s 9-10 minute video on Canvas, show video presentation in class, answer questions, 10%. The video needs to include every group member. It may NOT consist of the typical series of individual statements.
  4. 11/30, each member of the group sends me a private email reporting a determination of the percentage of the contribution provided by each team member. No text is accepted; simply a number for each member of the group including yourself. (If appropriate, individuals’ grades will reflect unanimous reporting in disproportionate contributions, either high or low.) 2%
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, applicable to a particular profession, or replete with technology. Electives will meet those interests; this course is, at heart, conceptual.

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, formative 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 want to 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.

Attendance policy

Missing class for any reason, other than that in University policy, costs 5 points.
(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 examples 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, *summative grades* provide the most concrete form of feedback. 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.

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.
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
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 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 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 readily available.

In this course e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. 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.

**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 tutorials are available online.

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.

**Late assignment policy**

Late assignments will only be excused in situations following University policy. In all other cases, assignments received after the deadline will be penalized 10% per 24-hour period.
**Letter grades**

- A  100-94
- A-  93-90
- B+  89-86
- B   85-83

NOTE: Grades of B- or below do *not* meet the School requirement that this count as a core course.

**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 contact the school. Voice mail is sent to my email.

I will also make every effort to grade and return assignments within 2 weeks.

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)
- Stress management
- Personal safety

**Style manual**

We will use the American Psychological Association’s style manual. In particular, please be sure to follow its citation formats and rules on language bias.