

# INF 380E Perspectives on Information

## Course Information:

Unique: 27405

Location: UTA 1.208

Tuesdays, 6 - 9 PM

## Instructor Information

Dr. Craig Blaha

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office: UTA 5.456

office hours: Thursdays 10 AM – 11:30 AM and by appointment

## Course description

A multi-disciplinary and historical examination of information as a primary and foundational concept. Contrasts key literature from information studies with perspectives from other fields.

## Course Objectives

- Provide a foundation for understanding the theories, assumptions and perspectives on the nature of information as it appears in a variety of fields.
- Identify the role of information studies, broadly construed, and its role in particular environments and contexts.
- Develop a vocabulary and expertise for thinking critically about the challenges inherent in defining, organizing and accessing information.
- To introduce students to some important “classic” papers, thinkers, concepts, and research fronts in the field
- Participate in discussions regarding current and evolving information forms, tools and technologies, institutions, and policies.
- Envision future directions for information studies and the information professions.

## Required Texts

Blair, A. (2010). *Too much to know: managing scholarly information before the modern age*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press.

Floridi, L. (2010). *Information: a very short introduction*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Gleick, J. (2011). *The information: a history, a theory, a flood* (1st ed). New York: Pantheon Books.

Lanier, J. (2010). *You are not a gadget: a manifesto* (1st ed). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Noble, S. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression*. New York: NYU Press.

## Assignments and Expectations

### Participation

Students are expected to attend each class, show up on time and ready to actively engage with the in class discussions and activities, having thoroughly read the assigned materials and thought not only about each reading, but how the readings relate to each other, topics we have previously discussed in class, and how they relate to current events.

It is also important that students work hard to demonstrate respect for the opinions of others, both by listening first to understand, and by carefully and thoughtfully explaining your own ideas.

### Discussion Questions

Students will submit to Canvas two discussion questions about the assigned reading by Tuesday morning at 6 AM. Late discussion questions will not be accepted. Discussion questions should be at least one paragraph long and should make it clear that you have both read and thought about the assigned material.

I will prioritize the discussion questions for class based on what I hope you get out of the readings. We will not have time to discuss a submission from each student during each class. Discussion questions are an opportunity for you to bring your own particular point of view and interests to the material we cover in class, and students are encouraged to connect the material to current events.

### Group Presentations

Students will make a 30 – 40 minute presentation about either a sub-discipline of information studies (e.g.: usability) or an information related concept (e.g.: metadata). Presentations will be followed by a brief question and answer period. There are twelve different topics, so each presentation group will include a maximum of 3 – 4 students, depending on the enrollment in the course.

This is intended to be a substantial assignment. Students are expected to seek out appropriate literature or experts, become familiar with the overall topic, tease out the perspective on information as it relates to this topic, present the material in an effective way to the class, and answer questions from the instructor and classmates. These presentations have a few goals:

- a. For you to familiarize yourself with an area of information studies that you believe will be relevant to your future
- b. To educate and inform your colleagues about the selected topic
- c. To practice your presentation skills and refine your vocabulary related to that topic
- d. To critically examine the perspectives on information common to that topic

Presentation topics will be discussed and assigned/selected on the first day of class. The available topics include:

1. Information Retrieval
2. Archival Studies
3. Information Architecture
4. Information Management
5. Physical Libraries
6. Digital Libraries
7. Knowledge Representation and Reasoning (including Semantic Network)
8. Knowledge Management and Competitive Intelligence
9. Information Behavior (Information Seeking, Everyday Information Behavior, Information Avoidance, etc.)
10. Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Other Kinds of Information Work
11. Privacy and Security
12. Health Informatics

Students will be given some time during class to touch base with their presentation group and will be asked to write progress reports at various times over the course of the semester.

Each group will create a series of 3 – 5 quiz questions regarding the most important parts of their presentation. I will compile these quiz questions in canvas and we will use them as the final exam on the last day of class.

#### Group presentation grading scheme

Each member of the group will receive an individual grade based on their participation and the overall quality of the presentation. I will determine the grades based on the following criteria:

- a. 20% Participation as a member of your group in preparing for the presentation
- b. 20% Participation as a member of your group during the presentation
- c. 40% Presentation quality
  - i. Avoiding the use of “um” and other presentation crutches
  - ii. Appropriate use of body movement, clear voice, eye contact
  - iii. Content and style of Power Point or other presentation support
  - iv. Audience engagement
  - v. Assisting other group members with transitions
- d. 20% Group presentation questions

#### Essay

Students will submit a five-page essay on a topic of their choice related to the class. This assignment should achieve the following goals:

1. Act as a summative assessment; a culminating project that synthesizes knowledge over the course of the semester. This is your opportunity to formally explore how different perspectives on information relate to your topic.
2. An opportunity to familiarize yourself with the literature in information studies; a substantial component of this essay should be a literature review of published, peer-reviewed journal articles that are relevant to your topic.
3. An opportunity to improve your writing skills.

The essay will be broken up into seven steps. Each of these steps will be discussed in more detail in class. These steps are designed to help improve your writing and to break up the writing process to make it more manageable. Each step will be graded and all of the steps are required. The different steps are:

1. Topic selection
  - a. Choose a topic that is relevant to your concentration, personal interests, or future career.
  - b. Resources
    - i. Compile a list of at least ten resources that are relevant to your topic, formatted using APA.
    - ii. At least 5 of these resources should be peer-reviewed journal articles.
  - c. Summarize each resource using a short (3 – 4 sentence) paragraph.
  - d. Copy any quotations you believe will be useful in your paper, including proper APA in-text citation format.
  - e. You may add resources later in the semester, and you do not have to include all of the resources you submit for this assignment in your final essay.
2. Outline
  - a. Decide how you will organize your ideas.
  - b. Your essay will include an introduction and conclusion paragraph, and your outline should include the key points you plan to discuss in the intro and conclusion (not just “intro to the topic”, for example). A substantial portion of your paper should explore how different perspectives on information relate to your topic.
  - c. Include the quotations you plan to use in the proper location in your outline, including your properly formatted in-text APA citation.
3. Draft
  - a. Write your first draft by following your outline exactly if possible.
  - b. Include a cover page with a clear description of the topic you have chosen to write about.
  - c. Include a separate page with your resource list.
  - d. Your draft should be at least five pages long, double spaced using Calibri 11 point font and 1 inch margins.
4. Peer Review

- a. Dr. Blaha will assign peer reviews to a group of at least three people to work together throughout the semester.
- 5. Revised Draft
  - a. Your revision will have to take into account the feedback from your peer group as well as any improvements you made on your own. Revisions will be graded based the criteria listed below.
- 6. Final Draft
  - a. If your revised draft grade falls short of your personal goal, you have the option to revise your essay and turn it in for a (possibly) higher grade, replacing the revised draft grade. If you are completely satisfied with your grade, you do not need to submit a final grade and your revised draft grade will count as your final draft grade.

The essay will be evaluated using the traditional letter grade scale listed below (A – F). Your essay will be graded on the following 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
- 6. The depth, quality, and rigor of your exploration of different perspectives on information and how they relate to your topic.

## Grading

Each of the components listed above will count toward your final grade as follows:

Final Exam	10%
Participation	10%
Discussion Questions	20%
Group presentation	30%
Essay	30%

## Grading Scale

The standard grading scale will be used to evaluate student work:

- 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

F 0-59

## Course Schedule

Topic	Assignments Due:
Week 1: 1/22	
Introduction Discuss essay topics and select presentation assignments A few of my favorite "perspectives"	None
Week 2: 1/29	
The information revolution and the language of information Confirm essay and presentation topics	Floridi (2010) chapters 1 & 2 Zins (2007) Essay Topic Selection Discussion Questions
Week 3: 2/5	
Mathematical, semantic, physical, biological, economic info Discuss finding resources Presentation team meetings – planning	Floridi chapters 3 – 7 Loose (1997) No Discussion Questions due; students will analyze and present one chapter, assigned by Blaha, from Floridi
Week 4: 2/12	
Information ethics, physis and techne Check in on essay research Overview of essay outlines Presentation team meetings – check-in and sources	Floridi – Chapter 8 and Epilogue Essay resources due Discussion Questions
Week 5: 2/19	
Information Management Presentation team meetings – outline Peer discussion of essay outline progress	Blair 1 – 117 Essay outline due Discussion Questions
Week 6: 2/26	
Reference and finding devices, compilers, impact of early reference books Presentation team meetings – first draft	Blair 117 – 265 Discussion Questions
Week 7: 3/5	
The Information – Part 1 Essay draft peer progress discussion	Gleick Chapter 1 – 5 Nunberg (2011) Discussion Questions Essay draft due

Week 8: 3/12	
The Information – Part 2 Essay draft peer workshop	Gleick Chapter 6 – 11 Discussion Questions
Week 9: 3/19 – Spring Break	
Spring Break	
Week 10: 3/26	
The Information – Part 3 Student Presentation 1: Information Retrieval Student Presentation 2: Archival Studies	Gleick Chapter 12 – Epilogue Discussion Questions
Week 11: 4/2	
What is a person? What will money be? Student Presentation 3: Information Architecture Student Presentation 4: Information Management Peer Discussion of Essay Draft	Noble pp. 1 – 118 Essay peer review due Discussion Questions
Week 12: 4/9	
The unbearable thinness of flatness, making the best of bits, future humors Student Presentation 5: Physical Libraries Student Presentation 6: Digital Libraries	Noble pp. 119 – 187 Discussion Questions Essay Revision due
Week 13: 4/16	
Student Presentation 7: Knowledge Representation and Reasoning (including Semantic Network) Student Presentation 8: Knowledge Management and Competitive Intelligence	Lanier Part 1 and 2 Discussion Questions
Week 14: 4/23	
Student Presentation 9: Information Behavior (Information Seeking, Everyday Information Behavior, Information Avoidance, etc.) Student Presentation 10: Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Other Kinds of Information Work	Lanier Part 3, 4, and 5 Discussion Questions
Week 15: 4/30	

Student Presentation 11: Privacy and Security Student Presentation 12: Health Informatics Peer discussion – final essay	Fricke (2009) Bellinger, G., Castro, D., & Mills, A. (2004). Braganza, A. (2004). Buckland, M. (1991). Discussion Questions
Week 16: 5/7	
Class wrap- up	Final Essay Due

## Resources

### Style Manuals

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.

## University Policies

### Academic Integrity

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

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

"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

"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>). I 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!

## Bibliography

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- Losee, R. (1997). Discipline independent definition of information. *Journal of the American Society for Information and Society*, 48(3), 254-269. Also available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/%28SICI%291097-4571%28199703%2948:3%3C%3E1.0.CO;2-H/issuetoc>
- Nunberg, G. (2011, March 20). [Review of the book *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood*] *New York Times Book Review*, pp. 1, 10-11. Also available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/books/review/book-review-the-information-by-james-gleick.html?\\_r=1&ref=bookreviews](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/books/review/book-review-the-information-by-james-gleick.html?_r=1&ref=bookreviews)
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- Zins, C. (2007). Conceptual approaches for defining data, information, and knowledge. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, 58(4), 479-493. Also available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/asi.v58:4/issuetoc>