INF 380E Perspectives on Information

Course Information:
Unique: 27640
Location: UTA 1.208
Tuesdays, 3 – 6 PM

Instructor Information
email: craig.blaha_at_utexas.edu
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
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 discussions 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 for each reading and should make it clear that you have both read and thought about the assigned material.

I will prioritize the discussion questions for class. We may 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.

In-Class 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 to inform themselves, come to a familiarity with the overall topic, tease out the nature of information as related to this topic, present the material in an effective way to the class, and answer questions from the instructor and classmates on this topic. These presentations have a few goals:

- For you to familiarize yourself with an area of information studies that you believe will be relevant to your future
- To educate and inform your colleagues about the selected topic
- To practice your presentation skills and refine your vocabulary related 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

Presentation assignments will be selected the first week of class. Students will be given some time during class to touch base with their presentation group and write up a progress report over the course of the semester.

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.
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 six steps. Each of these steps will be discussed in more detail in class:

1. Topic selection
2. Resource list
3. Outline
4. Draft
5. Peer review
6. Final draft

Grading

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

- Participation 20%
- Discussion Questions 20%
- In-class 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
### Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments Due:</th>
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<td><strong>Week 1: 9/4</strong></td>
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| Introduction  
Discuss essay topics and select presentation assignments  
A few of my favorite “perspectives” | None |
| **Week 2: 9/11** | |
| The information revolution and the language of information  
Confirm essay and presentation topics | Floridi (2010) chapters 1 & 2  
Zins (2007)  
Essay Topic Selection |
| **Week 3: 9/18** | |
| Mathematical, semantic, physical, biological, economic info  
Presentation team meetings – planning  
Discuss finding resources | Floridi chapters 3 – 7  
Loose (1997) |
| **Week 4: 9/25** | |
| Information ethics, physis and technē  
Check in on essay research  
Presentation team meetings – check-in and sources  
Overview of essay outlines | Floridi – Chapter 8 and Epilogue  
Essay resources due |
| **Week 5: 10/2** | |
| Information Management  
Presentation team meetings – outline  
Peer discussion of essay outline progress | Blair – 1 – 117 |
| **Week 6: 10/9** | |
| Reference and finding devices, compilers, impact of early reference books  
Presentation team meetings – first draft | Blair 117 – 265  
Essay outline due |
<p>| <strong>Week 7: 10/16</strong> | |
| The Information – Part 1 | Gleick Chapter 1 – 5 |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Week 8: 10/23</th>
<th>Essay draft peer progress discussion</th>
<th>Nunberg (2011)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Information – Part 2</td>
<td>Gleick Chapter 6 – 11</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 1: Information</td>
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<td>Retrieval</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 2: Archival</td>
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<td>Studies</td>
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<td>Week 9: 10/30</td>
<td>The Information – Part 3</td>
<td>Gleick Chapter 12 – Epilogue</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 3: Information</td>
<td>Essay draft due</td>
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<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 4: Information</td>
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<td>Management</td>
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<td>Week 10: 11/6</td>
<td>What is a person? What will money be?</td>
<td>Lanier Part 1 and 2</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 5: Physical</td>
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<td>Libraries</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 6: Digital</td>
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<td>Libraries</td>
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<td>Week 11: 11/13</td>
<td>The unbearable thinness of flatness,</td>
<td>Lanier Part 3, 4 and 5</td>
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<td>making the best of bits, future</td>
<td>Essay peer review due</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 7: Knowledge</td>
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<td>Representation and Reasoning (including</td>
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<td>Semantic Network)</td>
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<td>Student Presentation 8: Knowledge</td>
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<td>Management and Competitive</td>
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<td>Intelligence</td>
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<td>Week 12: 11/20</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Week – individual</td>
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<td>meetings to discuss paper and</td>
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<td>presentations</td>
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<td>Behavior (Information Seeking,</td>
<td>Bellinger, G., Castro, D., &amp; Mills, A.</td>
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<td>Information Avoidance, etc.)</td>
<td>Braganza, A. (2004).</td>
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<td>Supported Cooperative Work and Other</td>
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<td>Kinds of Information Work</td>
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<td>Peer discussion – final essay</td>
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<td>Week 14: 12/4</td>
<td>Student Presentation 11: Privacy and</td>
<td>Final Essay Due</td>
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<td>Security</td>
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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](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](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/appn.html](http://www.utexas.edu/student/Registrar/catalogs/gi04-05/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


