

INF 380E Perspectives on Information

Course Information:

Unique: 27535

Location: UTA 1.212

Thursdays, 12 – 3 PM

Instructor Information

Dr. Craig Blaha

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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

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.

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. Students have one “free” missed class; I understand that stuff happens and you might need to miss a class. If you need to miss more than

one class, talk to me about it first, since missing two classes usually results in a grade less than a B. Avoid scheduling anything during class time (doctor appointments, interviews, etc.).

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.

Technology Use During Class

Please be respectful with your use of technology during class. There are times that having a laptop will be useful and helpful in class, but please be diligent about avoiding distraction. If you need to take a phone call or send a text, please wait until break if possible or take it outside of the classroom if it is urgent.

Discussion Questions

Students are expected to bring one thoughtful idea or question related to each reading assignment (each chapter or each article for the week, so you are likely to have multiple questions each week). You do not need to submit anything to Canvas, but I may call on you to share your question related to the reading during class. Discussion questions should be a sentence or two long for each reading and should make it clear that you have both read and thought about the assigned material.

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. Discussion questions count toward your participation grade.

Florida Presentation

Students will be asked to work in a small group to summarize one of the chapters in Floridi (2010) and explain that chapter to the rest of the class. A survey in canvas will allow the students to rank their preferences among a few different chapters, and Blaha will select the particular chapter that the group will address. More details will be shared in class.

Semester Paper and Presentation

Students will submit a 1,500 to 2,500-word (5–10 double-spaced page) essay on a topic of their choice related to the class. This assignment should achieve the following goals:

1. Act as an evaluative and comparative summary; 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. You must use the readings and discussions from class as the foundation of your essay.
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.

The essay assignment has 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 make the writing process more manageable.

1. Topic selection
Choose a topic that is relevant to your concentration, personal interests, or future career.
2. Resources
 - a. Compile a list of ten or more articles or books that are relevant to your topic, formatted using APA.
 - b. At least five (5) of these resources should be peer-reviewed journal articles.
 - c. You will add resources later in the semester, especially the readings we cover in class.
3. 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 introduction 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.
4. Draft
 - a. Write your first draft by following your outline as closely as possible.
 - b. Include a cover page with a clear description of the topic you have chosen to write about.
 - c. Include a separate double-spaced page or pages with your resource list.
5. Peer Review
I will use Canvas to assign peer reviewers to review each other’s work and offer reactions, comments, and suggestions.
6. Final Draft
Your second draft will have to take into account the feedback from your peer group as well as any improvements you made on your own. Your second draft should be submitted to Canvas under the “Final Draft” assignment, and I will grade your submission based upon the criteria listed below.
7. Final Draft Revision
If your final draft grade falls short of your personal goal, you have the option to revise your essay and resubmit it for a higher grade, replacing the earlier draft grade. If you submit a revised essay to Canvas before the deadline for the final draft listed on the syllabus, I will re-grade your essay. My evaluation of your revision will use both the criteria listed below and a comparison of your revision to your earlier assignment to see how thoroughly you have responded to the comments and suggestions from your reviewers and me. Your final draft grade will replace your revised draft grade when I calculate your grade for the semester.

If you are completely satisfied with the grade you earned for the first submission of your final draft, you do not need to submit a revised final draft, and your grade will stand as is.

The essay will be evaluated using the traditional letter grade scale A–F. Your essay will be graded using the following evaluative criteria:

1. Your use of course material and discussions as the foundation of your essay
2. The depth, quality, and rigor of your exploration of different perspectives on information and how they relate to your topic
3. The clarity of thought demonstrated in your essay
4. Your use of outside resources (including full APA citations)
5. The structure of the essay and how well you followed writing conventions
6. Grammar and spelling
7. The overall quality of the essay.

If you plagiarize at any stage of the writing process, you will fail the class. The expectations related to citation and how to avoid plagiarism will be explained in excruciating detail as we get closer to the submission deadline, but it is your responsibility as a graduate student to understand and follow APA citation guidelines and to clearly differentiate between your own work and that of others. In addition, you will have access to the Turnitin software to test your own paper for plagiarism before you submit it for my review.

Students will be required to give a five-minute presentation summarizing their essay for the class.

Grading

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

Participation	20%
Florida Presentation	20%
Essay presentation	20%
Essay	40%

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

A grade of B (not B-) is required for this course to fulfill the core course requirement.

Course Schedule

Topic	Assignments Due:
Week 1: 1/23	
Introduction A few of my favorite “perspectives”	None
Week 2: 1/30	
Overview of information studies	Bush, V. (1945) Shannon, C. (1948) Weaver, W. (1949) Essay topic selection
Week 3: 2/6	
What is information? Finding resources and citation	Bellinger, G., Castro, D., & Mills, A. (2004) Braganza, A. (2004) Buckland, M. (1991) Frické (2009)
Week 4: 2/13	
The information revolution and the language of information Group work – preparation for presentations	Floridi (2010) chapters 1 & 2 Essay resources due
Week 5: 2/20	
Mathematical, semantic, physical,	Floridi chapters 3 – 5 No Discussion Questions due; students will analyze and present one chapter, assigned by Blaha, from Floridi
Week 6: 2/27	
biological, economic info	Floridi chapters 6 – 7 No Discussion Questions due; students will analyze and present one chapter, assigned by Blaha, from Floridi
Week 7: 3/5	
Information ethics, physis and techne	Floridi – Chapter 8 and Epilogue Essay outline due
Week 8: 3/12	
Museum perspective	Clifford (1991) Potential Blanton Visit
Week 9: 3/19 – Spring Break	
Spring Break	
Week 10: 3/26	
Career Services Discussion	No reading due Essay draft due
Week 11: 4/2	
	Gleick Chapter 1 – 3 Nunberg (2011)

	Essay peer review
Week 12: 4/9	
	Gleick Chapter 4 – 8 Essay final draft due
Week 13: 4/16	
	Gleick Chapter 9 – Epilogue
Week 14: 4/23	
Student Essay Presentations	Bias (2014) Doty (2017) Roy (2015) Schulze (2013)
Week 15: 4/30	
Student Essay Presentations	Gwizdka (2017) Gurari (2018) Zhang (2014)
Week 16: 5/7	
Class wrap- up	Essay final draft revision (optional) 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!

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