**INF 380E PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION**

**#27115**

Dr. Philip Doty

School of Information

Technology and Information Policy Institute

Center for Women’s and Gender Studies

University of Texas at Austin

Fall 2020

Class time: Monday, 3:00 - 6:00 PM

Office: All meetings online, about half synchronous on Zoom, about half asynchronous

Office hours: By appointment

Online through Zoom, by email, or by phone

Telephone: 512.471.3746 – direct line

512.471.2742 – iSchool receptionist

512.471.3821 – main iSchool office

Internet: pdoty@ischool.utexas.edu

Class URL: https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1282011

Teaching Assistants:

Yalin Sun

clairesun05@utexas.edu

Appointment via email

Nathan Davis

nathandavis@utexas.edu

Appointment via email

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Thanks to Professor Loriene Roy of the UT iSchool for the following. Dr. Roy introduces herself as Anishinabe, enrolled on the White Earth Reservation, a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Her father was Mississippi Band, her mother is Pembina Band, and, in her words, “we are mukwa, bear clan”:

We acknowledge that the iSchool sits on indigenous land. The Tonkawa lived in central Texas and the Comanche and Apache moved through this area. Today, various indigenous peoples from all over the globe visit Austin and/or call it home. We are grateful to be able to study and learn on this piece of Turtle Island.  Since our class is online, you may be contributing from other tribal lands. Here is a map that may help you in identifying the indigenous peoples of the land on which you study: <https://native-land.ca/>

To read more about land acknowledgement, see: Stewart, Mariah, "Acknowledging Native Land is a Step Against Indigenous Erasure," Insight Into Diversity, December 19, 2020. Available at: <https://www.insightintodiversity.com/acknowledging-native-land-is-a-step-against-indigenous-erasure/>

Many thanks to Dr. Roy for this acknowledgement and permission to quote her identification statement.

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

INF 380E Perspectives on Information is the sole required course in the Master of Science in Information Studies (MSIS) program at the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. The course is intended to help introduce students to the field of information studies, to the MSIS program at the iSchool, to important concepts in the field and cognate disciplines, and to each other. The course will also help students gain some familiarity with a small number of iSchool faculty members and their work.

Eight of 14 course meetings be synchronous on Zoom Monday 3:00 – 6:00 PM Central time. The others will happen asynchronously. I will **NEVER** record our interactions, nor should you.

The course examines information as a fundamental concept in information studies as well as in other disciplines and literatures. Thus, the course will look at a wide variety of ways of operationalizing the concept of information, especially at different historical moments, in multiple research traditions, and in various kinds of ways. While most of the narratives we will examine extol the idea of information and, indeed, privilege it, others will undermine it, questioning its value and even its existence. Such heterogeneity of views make it plain that information studies is an interdisciplinary field.

Overall, the course provides a foundation for understanding some theories, assumptions and perspectives on information as it appears in information studies and a variety of cognate fields. At the same time, however, the course aims to help students be informed, skeptical, and engaged readers of others’ work and thoughtful participants in conversations in information studies and beyond. Such participation requires serious consideration of others’ ideas without simple acceptance of any knowledge claims.

Being serious about ideas means, among other things, understanding that any discipline including our own is not “about facts,” but is rather, as some may put it, “a series of arguments, issues, and controversies” (Loewen, 1996, p. 47). An engaged information professional, no matter what their position and politics, and the engaged scholar exhibit an openness to ideas, a commitment to serious inquiry, and a spirit of critique and skepticism, not cynicism, discourtesy, or dismissal of others’ ideas.

This course aims to help students raise, confront, and seriously address important problems, questions, and controversies for which there are no easy answers and the resolution of which engender serious disagreement among people of reason and good will. Thus, we will treat each other, others in our School, and elsewhere, including the authors of our readings, with courtesy as well as a spirit of honest inquiry.

Further, upon successful completion of this course, students will have accomplished or be able to:

* Identify the role of information studies, broadly construed, and its role in particular environments and contexts.
* Explore how disciplines such as our own and others have looked at information as a primary and foundational concept.
* Discuss our field’s identity, whether called information studies, library and information studies, library and information science, information science, or any other number of names.
* Discuss the primary ways in which groups, organizations, and institutions employ information; delineating relationships and distinctions among forms of information work, professions, and institutions.
* Draw upon a vocabulary and expertise for thinking critically about the challenges inherent in defining, organizing and accessing information.
* Engage in the reflective, critical inquiry essential to graduate-level oral and written work.

Further, the course is designed to help students become further acquainted with collaborative work among and across the sections of the course this semester, using the variety of information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the iSchool available to support such collaboration.

# EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE

Students are expected to be involved, vigorous participants in class discussions and in the conduct of the class, whether synchronously or asynchronously. The instructor aims to have as many students as possible participate in each class meeting’s activities and discussion. In addition, students must:

• Be prepared and attend all synchronous class sessions and participate in all course activities, whether synchronous or asynchronous; attendance and engagement are particularly important to success in a course that meets asynchronously as well as synchronously. If a student misses a class, it is her responsibility to arrange with another student to obtain all notes, handouts, and assignment sheets.

• Read all material in the course schedule prior to the particular class. Students are expected to use the course readings to inform their course participation and their writing. Students must integrate what they read with what they say and write. This imperative is essential to the development of professional expertise and to the development of a collegial professional persona.

• Educate themselves and their peers. Successful completion of graduate programs and participation in professional life depend upon a willingness to demonstrate initiative and creativity. Participation in the professional and personal growth of colleagues is essential to one’s own success as well as theirs. Such collegiality is at the heart of scholarship and demands commitment to everyone’s success.

• Spend 3-4 hours in preparation for each hour in the classroom for a graduate course. Thus, three credit hours per week demand c. 10-12 per week hours of reading, writing, and general preparation outside the classroom when we meet synchronously, 13-15 hours per week when we do not.

• Complete all assignments on time. The instructor will **not accept late assignments** except in the limited circumstances noted below. Failure to complete any assignment on time will result in a failing grade for the course.

• Ask for help from the instructor either in class, during office hours, on the telephone, through email, or in any other appropriate way. Email is especially appropriate for information questions, and the instructor will ordinarily respond to a message within twenty-four hours. Please do **NOT** use the messaging features in Canvas; use direct email.

The value of **academic integrity** is paramount in the academy and professional life more generally, especially in a discipline such as information studies. The UT Dean of Students has an excellent, brief summary of means for ensuring academic integrity (https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php); also see the three links at that page.

**Academic dishonesty**, such as plagiarism, cheating, or academic fraud, on the other hand, is intolerable and will incur severe penalties, including failure for the course. In addition, all instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to both the iSchool administration and the UT Dean of Students. If there is concern about behavior that may be academically dishonest, students should consult the instructor.

The instructor is happy to provide all appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The University’s Office of the Dean of Students at 471.6259, 471.4641 TTY, can provide further information and referrals as necessary.

**ANALYSIS AND HOLISM IN READING, WRITING, AND PRESENTING**

Students in this class must be analytic in their reading of others' work, in their own writing, and in their presentations. What follows are suggestions for developing analytic and critical methods of thinking and communication. These suggestions are also indications of what you should expect from the writing and speaking of others.

At the same time, however, please remember that a holistic, integrative understanding of context must always complement depth of analysis.

* First and foremost, maximize clarity – be clear, but not simplistic or patronizing.
* Remember that writing is a form of thinking, not just a medium to display the results of thinking. Make your thinking and writing engaging, reflective, and clear.
* Provide enough context for your remarks that your audience can understand them but not so much that your audience's attention or comprehension is lost.
* Be specific.
* Avoid jargon, undefined terms, undefined acronyms, colloquialisms, clichés, and vague language.
* Give examples.
* Be critical, not dismissive, of others' work; be skeptical, not cynical.
* Answer the difficult but important questions: How? Why? So what?
* Support assertions with evidence.
* Make explicit why evidence used to support an assertion does so.
* Identify and explore the specific practical, social, and intellectual implications of any potential courses of action you recommend or describe.
* Be evaluative. Synthesize and internalize existing knowledge without losing your own critical point of view.
* Identify the specific criteria against which others' work and options for action will be assessed.

See the Standards for Written Work and the assignment descriptions in this syllabus for further explanations and examples.

**STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN WORK**

Students will meet professional standards of clarity, grammar, spelling, and organization in written assignments and should review the standards below before and after writing. The instructor uses them to evaluate all assignments. To begin, every writer is faced with the problem of not knowing what her audience knows; therefore, effective communication depends upon maximizing clarity. Similarly, good writing makes for good thinking and vice versa. Friedman & Steinberg remind us that “reading, writing, and thinking are interrelated” and are all essential to learning (1989, xiii and p. 9).

Recall that writing is a form of inquiry, a way to think, not a reflection of some supposed static thought “in” the mind. Writing is not only a means to communicate with others, but is also a means to discover our own ideas more completely and in context, “to learn the full meaning of these ideas by seeing them in relation to each other” (Friedman & Steinberg, p. 22). Well known political theorist and policy expert Aaron Wildavsky argues in *Craftways: On the Organization of Scholarly Work* (1989, p. 9):

I do not know what I think until I have tried to write it. Sometimes the purpose of writing is to discover whether I can express what I think I know; if it cannot be written, it is not right. Other times I write to find out what I know; writing becomes a form of self discovery . . . . [F]ew feelings compare with the exhilaration of discovering a thought in the writing that was not in the thinking.

Wildavsky’s book is now in its seventh enlarged edition published in 2019 and available as an e-book in the UT Libraries. Please remember, however, that we need not adopt the incipient positivism to appreciate Wildavsky’s point.

All written work for the class must be done on a word-processor and double-spaced, with 1" margins all the way around and in either 10 or 12 pt. font, in one of three font styles: Times, Times New Roman, or Palatino.

Some writing assignments demand the use of references and may require either footnotes or endnotes. It is particularly important in professional schools such as the School of Information that notes and references are impeccably done. In this course, students must use APA (American Psychological Association) standards. There are other common bibliographic and note formats, for example, in engineering and law, but social scientists and a growing number of humanists use APA. Familiarity with standard formats is essential for understanding others' work and for preparing submissions to professional societies, journals, funders, professional conferences, and the like. Students should **always follow the instructor’s directions** for written work and consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2019, 7th ed.) and Purdue’s OWL (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\_and\_citation/apa\_style/apa\_formatting\_and\_style\_guide/general\_format.html/).

Students should **not use a general dictionary or encyclopedia** for defining terms in graduate school or in professional writing. Instead, students should consult a specialized dictionary, e.g., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; subject-specific encyclopedia, e.g., the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*; and/or a glossary or dictionary provided by a reputable professional association. The best alternative, however, is possession of an understanding of the literature related to the term sufficient to provide a definition in the context of the literature.

Students should always use a standard spell checker but be aware that spell checking dictionaries have systematic weaknesses: they exclude most proper nouns, e.g., personal and place names; they omit most technical terms; they omit most foreign words and phrases; and they cannot identify homophones, e.g., "there" instead of "their,” or the error in writing "the" in place of "them."

It is important to **proofread work thoroughly** and be precise in editing it. It is often helpful to have someone else read one’s writing, to eliminate errors and to increase clarity. Reading one’s work aloud is another useful and widely used strategy for improving one’s writing. While the instructor relies on submission of all assignments in Canvas to the appropriate Assignment folder, please be certain that all assignments clearly indicate:

* The title of the assignment
* The student’s name
* The date
* The class number and title – INF 380E Perspectives on Information.

The instructor will be happy to address any questions about these standards.

Since the production of professional-level written work is one of the aims of the class, the instructor reads and edits students’ work as the editor of a professional journal or the moderator of a technical session at a professional conference would. The reminders below help produce professional written work appropriate to any situation. Note the asterisked errors in #'s 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 20, and 24 (some have more than one error):

1. Number all pages after the title page. Notes and references do not count against page limits.
2. Use formal, academic prose. Avoid colloquial language, \*you know?\* It is essential in graduate work and in professional communication to avoid failures in diction – be serious and academic when called for, be informal and relaxed when called for, and be everything in between as necessary. For this course, avoid words and phrases such as "agenda," "problem with," "deal with," "handle," "window of," "goes into," "broken down into," "viable," and "option."
3. Avoid clichés. They are vague, \*fail to "push the envelope," and do not provide "relevant input."\*
4. Avoid computer technospeak such as "input," "feedback," or "processing information" except when using such terms in specific technical ways.
5. **Avoid using “content” as a noun.**
6. Do not use the term "relevant" except in its information retrieval sense. Ordinarily, it is a colloquial cliché, but it also has a strict technical meaning related to information retrieval in information studies and cognate disciplines.
7. Do not use "quality" as an adjective; it is vague, cliché, and colloquial. Instead use "high-quality," "excellent," "superior," or whatever more formal phrase you deem appropriate.
8. Study the APA style convention for the proper use of ellipsis\*. . . .\*
9. Generally, avoid using the terms "objective" and "subjective" in their evidentiary senses; these terms entail major philosophical, epistemological controversy. Avoid terms such as "facts," "factual," "proven," and related constructions for similar reasons.
10. Avoid contractions. \*Don't\* use them in formal writing.
11. Be circumspect in using the term "this," especially in the beginning of a sentence. \*THIS\* is often a problem because the referent is unclear. Pay strict attention to providing clear referents for all pronouns. Especially ensure that pronouns and their referents agree in number; e.g., "each person went to their home" is a poor construction because "each" is singular, as is the noun "person," while "their" is a plural form. Therefore, either the referent or the pronoun must change in number.
12. "If" ordinarily takes the subjunctive mood, e.g., "If he were only taller," not “was.”
13. Put "only" in its appropriate place, near the word it modifies. For example, it is appropriate in spoken English to say that "he only goes to Antone's" when you mean that "the only place he frequents is Antone's." In written English, however, a better rendering is, "he goes only to Antone's."
14. Do not confuse possessive, plural, or contracted forms, especially of pronouns. \*Its\* bad.
15. Do not confuse affect/effect, compliment/complement, or principle/principal. Readers will not \*complement\* your work or \*it's\* \*principle\* \*affect\* on them.
16. Avoid misplaced modifiers. For example, it is misleading to write the following sentence: As someone interested in the history of Mesoamerica, it was important for me to attend the lecture. The sentence misleads because the phrase "As someone interested in the history of Mesoamerica" is meant to modify the next immediate word, which should then, obviously, be both a person and the subject of the sentence. It should modify the word "I" by preceding it immediately. One good alternative for the sentence is: As someone interested in the history of Mesoamerica, I was especially eager to attend the lecture.
17. Avoid use of "valid," "parameter," "bias," "reliability," and "paradigm," except in limited technical ways. These are important research terms and should be used with precision.
18. The words "data," "media," "criteria," "strata," and "phenomena" are still all PLURAL forms. They \*TAKES\* plural verbs. Unfortunately, that is no longer true for “opera” and “agenda.”
19. "Number," "many," and "fewer" are used with plural nouns (a number of horses, many horses, and fewer horses). “Amount," "much," and "less" are used with singular nouns (an amount of hydrogen, much hydrogen, and less hydrogen). Another useful way to make this distinction is to recall that "many" is used for countable nouns, while "much" is used for uncountable nouns.
20. \*The passive voice should generally not be used.\*
21. "Between" denotes two alternatives, while "among" three or more.
22. Generally avoid the use of honorifics such as Mister, Doctor, Ms., and so on when referring to persons in writing, especially when citing their written work. Use last names and dates as appropriate in APA.
23. There is no generally accepted standard for citing electronic resources. If you cite them, it is common to give an indication, as specifically as possible, of:

- responsibility (who?)

- title (what?)

- date of creation (when?)

- date viewed (when?)

- place to find the source (where? how?).

1. See the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2019, 7th ed.) for a discussion of citing electronic material and useful examples.
2. \*PROFREAD! PROOFREED! PROOOFREAD!\*
3. “Citation,” “quotation,” and “reference” are nouns; “cite,” “quote,” and “refer to” are verbs.
4. Use double quotation marks (“abc.”), not single quotation marks (‘xyz.’), as a matter of course. Single quotation marks usually indicate quotations within quotations in American English.
5. Provide a specific page number for all direct quotations. If the quotation is from a Web page or other digital source without page numbers, provide at least the paragraph number and/or other directional cues, e.g., “(Davis, 1993, section II, ¶ 4).”
6. In ordinary American English, as ≠ because. Assuming the two terms are identical often confuses syntax and the reader.
7. Use "about" instead of the tortured locution "as to."
8. In much of social science and humanistic study, the term "**issue**" identifies sources of public controversy or dissensus. Please use the term to refer to topics about which there is substantial public disagreement, NOT synonymously with general terms such as "topic.” This admonition is especially important in this course where the study of public policy is its main focus.
9. While the Congress and other legislative bodies have debates, careful policy writers and your instructors usually avoid the locution of “**public debate**.” Such a locution makes a series of faulty assumptions:

* It presumes that a public policy issue has only two “sides.” There are usually three or four or more perspectives on any topic of public dissensus that merit consideration. “Debate” hides this multivalent complexity.
* “Debate” implies that one “side” and only one “side” can be correct; that presumption ignores the fact that the many perspectives on a public policy issue have merit.
* “Debate” implies that there can be and will be one and only one “winner.” This presumption naively ignores the fact that some public policy issues are intractable, that these issues are often emergent as are their resolutions, and that compromise is oftentimes a mark of success rather than of failure or “surrender.”

1. Please do not start a sentence or any independent clause with “however.”
2. Avoid the use of “etc.” – it is awkward, colloquial, and vague.
3. Do not use the term “subjects” to describe research participants. “Respondents,” “participants,” and “informants” are preferred terms and have been for decades.
4. Do not use notes unless absolutely necessary, but, if you must use them, use endnotes not footnotes. Please discuss any such use with the instructors in advance.
5. Please adhere to this orthographic (spelling) convention of spelling Internet” with a capital “I” to indicate the TCP/IP-compliant computer network with a shared address convention. Otherwise, “internet” with a lower-case “i” simply means any of the many millions of networks of networks.

# SOME EDITING CONVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS’ PAPERS

While the instructor will react to most written assignments using Track Changes in MS Word, he may react to others in hard copy, scanning and returning those assignments online.

**Symbol Meaning**

# number OR insert a space; the context will help you decipher its meaning

AWK awkward and usually compromises clarity as well

BLOCK make quotations ≥ 4 lines into a block quotation without external

quotation marks

caps capitalize; usually accompanied by three short underscore marks

COLLOQ colloquial and to be avoided

dB database

FRAG sentence fragment; often means that the verb or subject is missing

ITAL italicize

lc make into lower case; usually accompanied by a strike through

org, org’l organization, organizational

PL plural

Q question

REF? what is the referent of this pronoun? to what or whom does it refer?

sp spelling

SING singular

w/ with

w.c.? word choice?

The instructor sometimes uses **check marks** to indicate that the writer has made an especially good point. **Wavy lines** indicate that usage or reasoning is suspect.

# GRADING

Grades for this course include:

A+ Extraordinarily high achievement,

not recognized by the University

A Superior 4.00

A- Excellent 3.67

B+ Good 3.33

B Satisfactory 3.00

B- Barely satisfactory 2.67

C+ Unsatisfactory 2.33

C Unsatisfactory 2.00

C- Unsatisfactory 1.67

F Unacceptable and failing. 0.00.

For more on this system and standards of work, please consult *General Information* (https://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/academic-policies-and-procedures/evaluation/#gradestext) and the *Graduate School Catalog* (https://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/degree-requirements/graduate-credit/ and http://catalog.utexas.edu/graduate/graduate-study/student-responsibility/). While the University does not accept the grade of A+ and it does not appear on a student’s transcript, the instructor may assign the grade to students whose work is extraordinary.

As made explicit on the iSchool Web site, INF 380E is the sole core course for the MSIS program (<https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/courses/class-description?courseID=5400> and <https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/handbooks/msis-program-handbook.pdf> [p. 6]). Further:

MSIS students must earn a grade of B or better in the MSIS core course[] in order for the course[] to apply to the master's degree. A grade of B- does NOT satisfy this requirement.

Nor can INF 380E with a grade less than B be used as an elective in the MSIS program.

The grade of B signals acceptable, satisfactory performance in graduate school. The instructor reserves the grade of A for students who demonstrate both a command of the concepts and techniques discussed as well as an ability to synthesize and integrate them in a professional manner and communicate them effectively, successfully informing the work of other students.

The grade of incomplete (X) is reserved for students in extraordinary circumstances and **must be negotiated with the instructor before the end of the semester**.

The instructor uses points to evaluate assignments, not letter grades. I use an arithmetic – not a proportional – algorithm to determine points on any assignment. For example, 14/20 points on an assignment does NOT translate to 70% of the credit, or a D. Instead 14/20 points is roughly equivalent to a B. If any student's semester point total ≥ 90 (is equal to or greater than 90), then she will have earned an A of some kind. If the semester point total ≥ 80, then she will have earned at least a B of some kind. Whether these are A+, A, A-, B+, B, or B- depends upon the comparison of point totals for all students. For example, if a student earns a total of 90 points and the highest point total in the class is 98, the student would earn an A-. If, on the other hand, a student earns 90 points and the highest point total in the class is 91, then the student would earn an A. The instructor will explain this system throughout the semester.

**TEXTS AND OTHER TOOLS**

There are **NO** required textbooks for this course. Instead, we will rely on papers, reports, chapters and other excerpts from books, and other material online for our required readings. These materials will be either on the open Web, available from the UT Libraries as part of (for example) their online journal subscriptions, or in Files in Canvas. Please recall that both the UT Libraries and Canvas require logging in with one’s UT EID and password and using multi-factor authentication. Complete citations for all readings are in the References at the end of this syllabus.

Students should supplement the required readings by other material in print and online as their interests and professional ambitions dictate.

Please remember that many of the terms, definitions, procedures, and epistemological and other assumptions discussed in the class, in our readings, and elsewhere are contentious. In fact, one of the goals of the course is to help elicit and examine some of these areas of dissensus, of disagreement. As you will see, there will often be important differences between the instructor’s linguistic and scholarly conventions and those of any particular source, as well as among the sources themselves. Learning to navigate this sea of uncertainty, but still adhere to rigorous standards for reading, evaluating, and doing work in information studies, should be one of your aims in the course and in the iSchool academic program.

# ASSIGNMENTS

All students must complete all assignments in order to earn credit for the course.

The instructor will provide additional information about each assignment, but assignments will generally be submitted in Canvas in the appropriate format. Some assignments will be completed individually while many others, e.g., those part of the final Wiki assignment at the semester, will be completed by students in groups. **GRP** indicates a group assignment.

All assignments must adhere to the UT Honor Code (https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/standardsofconduct.php) and with standards for first-rate professional-level work. All written assignments must be double-spaced and submitted as per the instructions in the Standards for Written Work and as per the instructor’s other written and verbal directions.

### **Assignment Date Due % of Grade**

Preparation and participation

Discussion questions (4 x 5%) SEP 14, 21 and 28, 20

NOV 14

Critical reflections (4 x 5%) SEP 14 and 28, 20

OCT 29, and NOV 2

Choice of topic for Wiki assignment SEP 14 ---

Instructor assigns terms and topics SEP 28 ---

Draft of Wiki assignment **GRP** OCT 12 ---

Peer review of Wiki article OCT 26 15

Final version of Wiki article **GRP** NOV 16 20

(Recorded) presentation on Wiki article **GRP** NOV 23 15

Group work evaluation form NOV 23 10

All assignments must be handed in on time. The instructor reserves the right to issue a course grade of F if **ANY** assignment is not completed and will not accept late assignments unless three criteria are met:

1. At least 24 hours before the date due, the instructor gives explicit permission to hand the assignment in late. This criterion can be met only in the most serious of health, family, or personal situations.

2. At the same time, a specific date and time are agreed upon for the late submission.

3. The assignment is submitted on or before the agreed-upon date and time.

# OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

The schedule may be adjusted. **C** indicates that a reading is in Files in Canvas; **LIS-EC** indicates that these readings were part of the LIS Extra Credit initiative by the iSchool student chapter of ALATLA in Summer 2020. Other readings are available from the UT Libraries or the open Web. The References section of the syllabus has detailed citations for all readings.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Synchronous** **meeting?** | **Topics** | **Readings** | **Assignments** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **1:** AUG 31 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | Introduction to the course and the syllabus  * Introduction to the UT iSchool and information studies | Syllabus |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| SEP 7 |  | **NO CLASS** – Labor Day |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **SAT**, SEP 12, 12:00 Noon |  |  | * Discussion questions – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **2**: SEP 14 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | A preliminary look at information (1)  * Michael Buckland on information as thing * A bit of a dustup | Buckland (1991a)  * Yerkey (1991) * Buckland (1991b) | Critical reflection on readings (1 p.) – 5%Choices of topics for final Wiki assignment |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **SAT**, SEP 19, 12:00 Noon |  |  | * Discussion questions – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **3:** SEP 21 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | A preliminary look at information (2)  * Michael Buckland on documents * Hope Olson on gender and classification  Leigh Star on ethnography and infrastructure | Buckland (1997)  * Olson (2007) * Star (1999) |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **SAT**, SEP 26, 12:00 Noon |  |  | Discussion questions – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **4:** SEP 28 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | A preliminary look at information (3)   * Shannon & Weaver’s mathematical theory of communication * Bush on “As We May Think” * Reddy on the conduit model of language * Ma on three influential models | Weaver (1949) **C**  * Bush (1948) * Reddy (1993) * Ma (2012) | Critical reflection on readings (1 p.) – 5%Instructor assigns teams and terms for Wiki assignment |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **5:** OCT 5 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | * Introduction to the Harry Ransom Center |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **6:** OCT 12 |  | * Information studies and its intersection with critical racial studies * Racialization | * Noble (2018a, pp. 64–109 and pp. 191-194) * Bashi (1998) * Roediger (2008) **C** * Daniels (2013) | Draft of Wiki assignment, ≥ 250 words |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **7:** OCT 19 |  | * Further engagement of race and information studies * Algorithmic fairness | Noble (2018b, pp. 171-181 and p. 200)Gillespie (2014) **C**  * Mehra & Gray (2020) **LIS-EC** | Critical reflection on readings – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **8:** OCT 26 |  | * Indigenous cultures, artifacts, and institutions of memory | Roy (2015)  * McCracken (2015)  Sentance (2018) **LIS-EC** | Peer review of Wiki draft (3-4 pp.) – 15% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **9:** NOV 2 |  | * Some contrarian views on “information” as a concept * A taste of information behavior research | Agre (1995)Nunberg (1996) **C**  * Day (2001) * Doty & Broussard (2017) **C** | Critical reflection on readings – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **10:** NOV 9 |  | Writing studio |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **SAT**, NOV 14, 12:00 Noon |  |  | Discussion questions – 5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **11:** NOV 16 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | Some views on the information professions   * On invisible work * On articulation work * A wisp of gender * Computer-supported cooperative work | Suchman (1995)Suchman (1996) **C**Star & Strauss (1997)  * Schmidt & Bannon (1992) * Bates (2015) | Final Wiki article – 20% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **12:** NOV 23 |  | Writing studio |  | Recorded teams’ presentations on Wiki article – 15% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **13:** NOV 30 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | Students’ Research I  * Students’ presentations |  | Evaluation of group – 10% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **14:** DEC 7 | **Synchronous by Zoom** | Students’ Research II  * Course summary |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (DQ’s)**

**Due SATURDAYS at 12:00 Noon Central time**

**SEP 12, SEP 19, SEP 26, and NOV 14 (20%)(4x 5%)**

**Discussion questions (largely from Dr. William Aspray) – Due four SATURDAYS BEFORE class at 12:00 Noon Central time, SEP 12, SEP 19, SEP 26, and NOV 14**

Prior to four of our synchronous class meetings, each student will write **one discussion question** stimulated by the required readings for that class meeting. These discussion questions will constitute 20% of each student’s final grade in the course, 5% for each of the four questions.

There are multiple purposes for these questions to be written:

* In order to develop good questions, a student must read the assigned readings carefully and critically.
* The formation of these questions is practice for the student in critically questioning a text and expressing this questioning in a clear and professionally rigorous manner.
* The presence of these questions enhances class discussion both because students come to class better prepared and because these questions help to focus and shape the discussion.
* These questions enable the individual student to customize the course to the student’s interests because it is much more likely that class time will be devoted to a particular topic if there is a well-crafted question for students and the instructors to discuss about that topic.

What makes for a good – or a bad – question?

* Questions that are factual, i.e., which can be answered by a specific fact, are generally bad questions. They do not promote classroom discussion, deep thinking, or significant engagement with the readings.
* Questions that address arcane topics – topics that are not within the realm of experience, knowledge, or interest of the other students (or instructors) – are generally bad questions because the group will not have the basis for a reasonable response and because there may be no interest in the topic even if the question can be addressed.
* Questions that require analysis, e.g., teasing out the details of a line of argument, are often good questions if they are about a central question or concern in the required readings.
* Questions that enable the students and instructors to discuss how to apply what they have read to the contemporary world are often good questions.
* Questions that draw comparisons across the assigned readings for that week or previous weeks, or draw comparisons with discussions held in previous class meetings, are often good questions. Such questions enhance the understanding of individual authors and integrate the material that appears in the course. For example, in the assigned reading, author A said X, but author B said Y. How can both X and Y be true?

What does a question look like?

Sometimes one will need to quote a passage or recreate a portion of an argument or context in which something was said before one can ask a question. Thus, it will be more common than not that a student’s question will not be a single sentence. There might be a few sentences that appear first in order to set up or contextualize the question itself. But every question should end with an actual question; each student’s “question” should not simply be a collection of assertions.

Each question should address **at least two** of the assigned readings, integrating and synthesizing them in some useful way. The student’s expression of the questions should make it clear which assigned readings the question is about. Sometimes, students have more than one question. Because students **must restrict themselves to submitting one question**, they must prioritize the single question that they most want to see discussed in class. Students should, however, bring additional questions in case time permits additional discussion. In any event, all students must read every assigned reading carefully and be ready to discuss it in class, no matter what the foci of their particular questions might be.

In class, the instructor will expressly elicit students’ reactions to the questions and readings, not strictly relying on volunteers. The goal is to encourage as many students as possible to participate fruitfully in every class session.

Late assignments will not be accepted, and failure to complete any assignment on time will result in failure for the course.

**CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON READINGS**

**Before class – Due SEP 14, SEP 28, OCT 19, and NOV 2– 20% (4 x 5%)**

**Critical reflections on readings (largely from Dr. Amelia Acker) – Due MON SEP 14, SEP 28, OCT 19, and NOV 2– 20% (4 x 5%)**

Each student will write four separate critical reflections on the readings for four of our class weeks, each reflection worth 5% of the course grade for a total of 20% across the four.

Each reflection will be c. 250 words long, that is, one double-spaced page, and will be completed and uploaded to the appropriate Assignment section of Canvas **before class**. Each reflection should synthesize each reading, either individually or as a group. Be sure to adhere to the Standards for Written Work elsewhere in the syllabus, checking them both before and after you have written your reflections.

Dr. Acker makes these suggestions as potential ways to address this assignment, but recall that they are only suggestions and not required:

* “Questioning how an idea or assumption plays out in a different social and/or cultural context
* “Identifying themes or keywords that were used across the readings
* “Questioning the author’s premise or assumption
* “Describing your concerns about the method or approach
* “Explaining how the reading (or readings) made you think of the context of information in a new way
* “Explanation of your own experience with some aspect of a reading (or readings).”

I will call on individuals in class to share their reflections to help catalyze and guide the class discussion. I will also use the discussion questions submitted by students on those days when both reflective essays and discussion questions are due.

Late assignments will not be accepted, and failure to complete any assignment on time will result in failure for the course.

**CREATING AN ARTICLE FOR THE PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION WIKI**

**Due dates – Throughout the term (60%)**

In the course of their professional duties, information professionals often prepare and maintain online sources of information, whether for their own organizations in intranets or to be shared more widely on the Internet. These sources include material such as FAQ’s (Frequently Asked Questions), annotated bibliographies, collections of policy and procedures documents, content management collections, interim work products, discussion fora, knowledge management sites, and more. This semester-long, team assignment aims to introduce students to the methods, sources, and research processes for contributing to a knowledge base of brief articles related to topics from our field

Wikis are among these commonly produced professional material, and the final assignment for INF 380E will be the production of a short article on a topic related to perspectives on information in information studies to be published on our course Wiki. Students in this section of INF 380E will choose **two** topics from **each of the three** categories below in Table 1: concepts, people and institutions, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) to submit as potential topics, from which the instructor will generate two-student teams to address one topic.

**Table 1: Potential Topics**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Concepts* | *People and institutions* | *Information and communication technologies (ICTs)* |
|  |  |  |
| 2016 Russian information warfare | Cambridge Analytica | Palm Leaf manuscripts, history of writing |
| Algorithmic bias | Charles Ammi Cutter | Parity bit |
| Bibliometrics and citation norms | Elfreda Chatman and information poverty | Physical layer |
| Boolean Algebra | Critical pedagogy of Pablo Freire | Presentation layer |
| Burning of books and burying of scholars, Qin Dynasty | Ron Day and the documentation movement | Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) |
| Census information | Brenda Dervin and sensemaking | Printing Press Woodblock printing, China and Korea |
| Positivism | John Dewey and American Pragmatism | Process layer |
| Preservation of Indigenous languages | Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress | Routers, firewalls, and UTM (unified threat management) |
| Project management | Zoia Horn, Librarian | Session layer |
| Protocols for Native American Archival Materials | IMLS | Claude Shannon, Mathematical Theory of Communication, and Entropy |
| Racial justice in librarianship OR UX OR archives OR data science | Karen Sparck Jones | TCP five-layer model |
| Semantic, syntactic information and truth | Carol Kuhlthau and the information search process (ISP) | TCP/IP |
| USA PATRIOT Act Section 215 (“libraries provision”) |  | Transport layer |
|  |  | Z39.50 protocol |

As is plain, possible topics range from processes, artifacts, and research phenomena to historical figures, emerging areas of concern, and important contemporary events. The course Wiki is not a public resource; instead it is restricted to our iSchool community and is designed to be contributed to and grow over time.

Resource documentation Wikis have a few advantages. They are relatively easy to create and distribute, they are usually collaboratively created and edited, there are many platforms for creating and maintaining Wikis, such platforms are stable but highly flexible, and users are familiar with Wikis, especially because of the wide use of and contribution to Wikipedia. Wikis can include not only text but also tables, graphs, video tutorials, and other materials.

Each two-student team will be assigned a final topic to explore throughout the semester, and the due dates for the various iterations of the assignment are in Table 2.

**Table 2: Due Dates and Description of the Wiki Article**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Assignment** | **% of final grade** | **Description** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **SEP 14** | Choice of topics | - | Each student will submit **two topics from each of the three categories** – a total of six (6) potential topics – as potential foci of their final assignments. The instructor and TAs will attempt to give students their choices whenever possible. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **SEP 28** | Notification and assignment of topic by the course instructor | - | Each student will be notified of their assigned topic and teammate via Canvas. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **OCT 12** | Draft due to Canvas module | - | Each team will produce a draft of at least 250 words and at least four possible sources for their Wiki entry. Teams will use the UT Wiki to develop their topics, since part of the team experience is working within that particular tool. Before the draft due date, students will submit the URL of their draft to Canvas so that Canvas can assign peer reviews. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **OCT 26** | Peer review due to Canvas module | 15% | Each individual student will produce a 250-word peer evaluation of another student team’s draft Wiki entry. Students will submit their review as an attachment to the Canvas peer review assignment, but feel free to make suggestions directly on your peer’s Wiki as well.  This review will be evaluated primarily on its clarity and ability to help the student team improve their work, and should respond to the evaluation criteria listed below. The obvious exception will be the word length should be at least 250 words but can exceed the maximum word length at this point in the assignment. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **NOV 16** | Final version | 20% | The ultimate version of the Wiki entry will be 500-750 words long, not counting references.  The entry will have formal citations to a minimum of six online and/or print sources, using APA 7. Please see a more complete description of requirements below. |
|  |  |  |  |
| **NOV 23** | Recorded Presentation in student’s own section | 15% | Each team will make a recorded 2-3 minute presentation about their research process exploring their Wiki topic and upload the link to the appropriate assignment on Canvas. |
| **NOV 30** | **Respond to the group work evaluation form** | 10% | Your instructor will make a Canvas “quiz” available that will give you the opportunity to review your own performance over the course of the semester, as well as the performance of your team member(s). This is one formal mechanism for communicating with the instructor about team dynamics and participation, but it is not the only opportunity. More information will be shared on Canvas, as well as through conversations throughout the semester. |

Evaluation Criteria:

1. Each final Wiki entry should be no less than 500 and no more than 750 words, not counting references.
2. Students should cite a minimum of six online and/or print sources.
3. Sources should be formally cited in APA 7th using Wiki citation linking to sources. The Purdue Online Writing lab is a good source to start with if you are not familiar with APA formatting: <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html>
4. Wiki entries should reflect graduate-level writing and complexity of thought. Given the minimal amount of space available for you to address some complex, broad, and deep topics, we expect each sentence to be carefully crafted and each word specifically and intentionally chosen.
5. The Wiki entries should act, where possible, as a culmination of what you have learned over the course of the semester. Each entry should touch on the relevant topics, theories, concepts, people, concerns, and events we have discussed, and should go beyond our necessarily brief in-class discussions to include a more critical, mature, and nuanced discussion.
6. The entry should make clear how the topic is related to the discipline of information studies and provide a useful perspective on information. **Imagine your audience to be early graduate students who are new to information studies** research, new to the iSchool community, and may not be familiar with the universe of possible topics related to the field of information studies.

Attribution:

Within the UT Austin Wiki framework, students do not need to identify themselves and may remain anonymous, allowing you to protect your identity outside of the confines of your particular course section. If, however, you chose to identify yourself within the Wiki platform, you are welcome to do that in a way that makes sense to you. Such identification could range from a simple by-line with your name and intended graduation class, to a brief bio (not counted toward the word count for the assignment!) about who you are with a link to your personal Web site.

We will also encourage each team to consider how they will manage copyright. One option to consider is the use of a creative Commons Copyright License, a description of this option can be found here:

<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/>

Your team’s choice of attribution and copyright will not affect your grade on this assignment.

This assignment reinforces several of INF 380E’s course objectives:

1. Developing a commitment to serving heterogeneous users of information services and products
2. A deepened understanding of the breadth and depth of the field of information studies and cognate disciplines, including through time and across multiple venues for professional practice
3. The fluid nature of particular professional job titles, but their consonance with long-time areas of expertise in information studies
4. Development of familiarity in working in teams, particularly through online collaboration
5. Opportunity to do in-depth research on topics of interest to students
6. Reflection about one’s professional identity and how that identity contributes both to making a more just and equitable world and to one’s moral and social development as a person.

Of special import to this assignment, as to the course as a whole, is students’ exploration of how their professional practice can embody the *ethos* of service, intellectual rigor and honesty, and resistance to oppression of any peoples that animates the field of information studies. They also undergird the iSchool movement and the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin in particular.

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