Class Time: Thursday, 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Location: SZB 464

Professor: Andrew Dillon
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Phone: (512) 471-3821
Office: SZB 564D
Office hours: By appointment

The readings for this class are password protected and linked to the required readings page. Each student enrolled in the class will receive a password to access the required readings. Please read all material prior to class.

If you would like the password prior to the first class day, please contact:

Kayla Chioco
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Teaching Assistant

Course Synopsis
This course will examine the nature of users – how they think, act and feel, and introduce students to the methods of user-centered systems design as practiced by information professionals. The class will marry theoretical analyses with practical exercises in user analysis, contextual enquiry, use observation, data capture and analysis, and information design evaluation.

The contexts for studying users will be the range of information environments in which we operate e.g., digital, inter-personal, facility-based etc. with particular emphasis on the creation of useful and usable information resources for users of all types. The aim of the course is to develop critical awareness and insights into the behaviors, motivations and needs of users with a view to using such insights to help shape improved information systems and to enable students to pursue more advanced studies in evaluation and user analysis.

Format of class
Lectures, small group discussions and exercises, student presentations
Course Objectives

We will study:

- the nature of users as psychological and social beings,
- individual and group differences among users,
- the response of users to various information scenarios,
- identifying trends and patterns in user behavior,
- the dynamics of user learning,
- user acceptance and user resistance to information systems
- the role of the information professional in system design and evaluation

Students will learn:

- basic evaluation methods to determine the usability and suitability of information resources for given users,
- the methods and process of a user-centered design process for such resources,
- critical awareness of the findings of research into user-centered design.

Grading & Assignments

Design diary (50% of final grade)
a set of critiques of any user interaction with an information environment (computer, person, or facility). These can be personal and experiential but should highlight the context of occurrence, the nature of the problem from the user's perspective, the theoretical issues underlying the nature of the problem, and a recommendation for re-designing the interaction to improve the user experience.

Term paper (50% of final grade)
Students will be required to compose, and present to the class, a term paper (5000 words in length) on an issue relevant to the class (broadly defined).
Course Schedule and Required Reading

Week one: Introduction to the course
Who are users?
How can we seek better understandings of users?
Why should we care?


Week two: The user-centered design process, part 1
History, application, variants


Week three: The user-centered design process, part 2
Methods, problems and pitfalls


Week four: Users as psychological beings, part 1
The cognitive paradigm
Situational and ecological perspectives
User learning and adaptation


Week five: Users as psychological beings, part 2
Individual differences among users
Personality and cognitive style


Week six: Users in context: Socio-technical analyses of users in organizations
The psychodynamic tradition
Adoption and Diffusion
Acceptance and resistance theories


Week seven: Usability evaluation
Usability defined for measurement
Expert-based, theory-based and user-based approaches


Week eight: Heuristic evaluation
Learning the standard method for quick inspections


**Week nine: Cognitive Walkthroughs**  
A more advanced method of inspection


**Week ten: Interviews, think-alouds, and surveys**  
When to use them  
How to develop reliable and valid surveys  
Pitfalls and problems


**Week eleven: Data analysis**  
Dealing with data from user studies and observations  
Basic data types

Slides will be made available on the web

**Week twelve: Data analysis 2**  
Descriptive and inferential statistics  
Confidence intervals  
Reporting findings

Slides will be made available on the web

**Week thirteen: The user specialist in information design**

