INLS 728: Seminar in Knowledge Organization
Spring, 2016 Topic: Using Classification Theory to Read Information Systems

Basic information

Time: Wednesdays, 12:20 to 3:05
Location: Manning 214

Instructor information

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Office: Manning 24
Office hours: after class, 3:15 to 4:15 on Wednesdays

Introduction

Classification, generally speaking, is the process of creating groups, relating groups, and assigning members to groups. Within information studies, the subfield of knowledge organization has developed a set of concepts and design approaches to create and assess classification systems that describe and relate documents, primarily according to their subject matter (or "aboutness"). This seminar will focus on using the conceptual apparatus of classification theory to interpret and "read" information collections that have been arranged and structured by classification systems. Our investigations will not be limited to reading "the library" but will extend to any sort of information system organized by any mechanism for category formation, from social media (for example, Twitter hashtags) to scientific data sets (such as the Encyclopedia of Life), to everyday retrieval devices (like Amazon's faceted browsing categories). Through our semester's readings, discussions, and activities, and through your own seminar projects, we will explore how classification theory, as articulated in knowledge organization and related domains, might help us to understand how information systems work as documents to be read: how their structure generates meaning, and how they function as forms of human expression.

We will not be studying classification as a means to facilitate information retrieval in this class. Instead, we will be investigating how the concepts of classification theory, as articulated via information studies, might be employed to interpret information systems (databases, repositories, libraries, archives, things organized with category schemes) as documents to be read. Accordingly, we will not be thinking about "usability" in the traditional way associated with information systems. We will be, essentially, exploring different ideas of use for information systems, and different means for comprehending "use."

Class structure

This class is a weekly seminar. Our class meetings will center around deep discussion of readings, as complemented by occasional in-class activities.

The beginning of the semester will focus on fundamental concepts of classification theory, primarily as conceived from within information studies (mostly from the subfield known as knowledge organization, which concentrates on the design and implementation of classification schemes). Occasionally, concepts from other fields, such as cognitive science, linguistics, biology, and textual studies will also be incorporated. Mastery of these concepts helps to enable a principled, focused approach to "reading" different sorts of information systems—or does it? This will be a question for us to debate as the semester proceeds: how do these concepts facilitate the development of both revealing and compelling interpretive readings of information systems?

Subsequently, each week of the course will examine different interpretive approaches, focusing on those that have been previously applied to understanding either organizing principles (concepts such as "the work" or "aboutness") to understanding organizing systems (various classificatory mechanisms, such as particular vocabularies) or to understanding information systems as organized with classificatory mechanisms (such as a section of a library or the photos labeled with a particular tag on Flickr). These interpretive approaches include rhetoric, genre theory, feminist theory, historical and philosophical analysis, critical race theory, queer theory, and critical theory. Our focus will be on understanding how these approaches have been, and might be, applied to understanding the expressive power of information systems. What does this mean? We will, for example, see how one might employ a rhetorical perspective in combination with the vocabulary of classification theory to understand how a particular information system constructs a rhetorical appeal based on ethos. In other words, we will be trying to see how these different interpretive approaches might enable us to understand how information systems work as communicative, expressive devices. (We will not be trying to understand how information systems work as efficient or effective retrieval devices. Nor will we be seeking to understand how these information systems were created, or to understand the intentions of their creators.)

Because work in this area remains limited, our readings will exhibit different levels of sophistication in terms of their mastery of classification fundamentals, deployment of theoretical frameworks, and interpretive goals. This will be an opportunity for us as a class to examine and discuss the kinds of knowledge, expertise, and skills that are necessary to produce compelling readings of information systems, and to discuss the range of goals for such interpretive activities. (For example, we might want to develop new vocabularies for how information systems work; we might want to advocate for changes in certain information systems; we might want to explore new design possibilities for information systems; and so on.)

Assignments and Assessment

Grading for the course will involve three components:

- Five short response papers (about 3 pages, or 1000 words each): 30 points (6 per paper).
- Discussion participation: 30 points (it's a seminar; discussion is vital).
- Seminar project: 40 points.

Submit the response papers to the Forums area in Sakai, so that everyone can read them before class.

Submit final papers using the Assignments tool in Sakai.

Course grades will be determined according to the following schedule:

- 95 or above H
- 75 to 94 P
- 60 to 74 L
- below 60 F

Five short response papers
For five weeks, dispersed throughout the semester, you will submit a reading-response paper one day prior to the class session. These papers will be distributed to the class to inform and structure our seminar discussions.

The class will be split into two groups: one group will submit response papers for weeks 4, 6, 8, 12, and 14, and the other group will submit response papers for weeks 5, 7, 10, 13, and 15.

These papers are short (about 3 pages) and meant to identify and begin to explore a single area of significant interest for you in the week's reading. (They are not meant to merely summarize the reading.)

Grading criteria for response papers

- Identifies a question or area of interest and explains why it's interesting. (This can be something that you don't understand.)
- Presents a position (not an answer) on the question or area (a way of approaching the question, or some other way of understanding it more fully; a means of opening discussion and debate about it).
- Provides evidence from the reading (past as well as present weeks is fine) to support the position.

Discussion participation

It's a seminar, which means that discussion is the primary mechanism for learning. We are a community of scholars working together to understand and apply the conceptual infrastructure of classification theory in new ways, and to ultimately understand information systems and their uses and experience in new ways. No one is expected to have "the answers"; there are no answers in that way. But everyone is expected to be prepared to explore potential, partial answers, to engage with the readings and concepts sincerely, and to contribute to discussions consistently and substantively.

Grading criteria for discussion participation

- Contributes to weekly discussions: initiates topics and has opinions about them. (Note that questions and points of confusion are excellent contributions.)
- Is prepared to talk about the weekly readings in class; makes references to the readings in discussion.
- Listens to others and responds to what they say in a courteous, respectful way.
- Invites comment from the group on matters of interest rather than pontificating.

Seminar project: read something

As typical with seminars, the primary output involves a significant, independent project. Our class readings and discussions are meant to provide the conceptual grounding for these independent explorations, but you will probably need to read additional material to inform your work.

Two class sessions (one in the middle of the semester and one at the end of the semester) will be devoted to facilitating your project work: you will make informal (ungraded) progress reports and discuss your ideas with your colleagues.

For master's students, the suggested structure of the seminar project is to *produce a reading of some information system,* incorporating both the conceptual vocabulary of classification theory to identify and analyze particular elements of the system under investigation and a particular approach to reading—most likely one of the approaches that we will look at during the course of the semester (such as rhetoric, genre theory, feminist theory, and so on: see the preliminary schedule). Because many information systems are very large, your reading will focus on a particular aspect of the system: for example, the tweets that include a particular Twitter hashtag (or a hashtag in a particular context, even), a particular set of related classes in the Library of Congress classification scheme as instantiated in a specific library or libraries, a particular browsing facet on Wine.com (such as Wine Style). Your goals in this paper are to:

- Deploy classificatory evidence, in conjunction with the concepts suggested through your reading approach, to establish *what* the structure of the information system is saying about its contents.
- Clarify, using classificatory evidence in conjunction with your reading approach, *how* the information system is expressing this argument.
- Suggest, making use of the perspective associated with your reading approach, some larger implications for your reading: for example, that the emancipatory potential of a particular Twitter

hashtag is dependent on its association with other hashtags, suggesting that hashtags in combination represent different classes than hashtags independently.

Emily Lawrence's recent paper about Netflix "altgenres" (such as "Cerebral Thrillers set in Japan") which we will read in Week 8 of the semester, provides a good example of this structure. Lawrence examines the "altgenre" as a rhetorical device to suggest ethical consequences associated with the use of altgenres.

For doctoral students, the project can be adapted to best facilitate your broader goals and interests. Some additional possibilities for the seminar project include:

- Identifying how a particular approach to reading information systems might inform their design (perhaps developing a prototype system that, for example, instantiates a queer perspective).
- Developing a new conceptual construct to facilitate reading information systems (for example, by seeing how reading approaches like genre theory require adaptation when applied to the information systems context).
- Proposing a tool to support reading information systems, as informed by classification theory and a particular reading approach (perhaps developing a prototype tool that, for example, shows how characteristics of the central members of a category change over time, or one that identifies flux in category boundaries).
- Making a case for how a particular way of framing or understanding classificatory concepts (such as "works" or "subjects" or "principles of division" or "facets") can facilitate the reading of information systems by illuminating certain mechanisms or effects.

To be successful, your paper should advance an original argument. Even if you are proposing a new design approach or new analysis tool, you need to explain and justify the approach you have taken (indeed, this will be the key element of your project). Providing evidence for your argument will undoubtedly require the synthesis of multiple sources, potentially including sources beyond the course readings, but the paper should not merely summarize the views of others. You will need to articulate and defend a position that extends the scholarship in the area you have chosen.

Papers that "read something" will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Explains why it is useful and appropriate to use a particular reading approach (e.g., genre theory) to interpret the information system that you have selected.
- Uses classificatory concepts, in conjunction with concepts from the selected reading approach, to explain *what* the information system "says."
- Uses classificatory concepts, in conjunction with concepts from the selected reading approach, to explain *how* the information system expresses its arguments.
- Suggests broader implications of your reading.
- Exhibits a systematic, organized document structure and clear argument progression. Communicates clearly and effectively, with proper grammar and spelling. Uses appropriate tone for scholarly work. Prose is concise and direct, without excess redundancy or ambiguity.

More general seminar papers will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Clearly outlines the general topic and defines its scope. Narrows the topic as necessary to enable a persuasive argument within the paper's length constraints. Explains the topic's importance and context.
- Develops and communicates a clear and original perspective or position on the topic.
- Contextualizes the topic via concise yet comprehensive summary of existing research and practice, using course readings and outside sources as necessary. Cites others' work appropriately.

- Supports the perspective or position through careful consideration of evidence. Appropriate evidence may include assessment of previous research, analysis of examples from existing systems, and so on.
- Exhibits a systematic, organized document structure and clear argument progression. Communicates clearly and effectively, with proper grammar and spelling. Uses appropriate tone for scholarly work. Prose is concise and direct, without excess redundancy or ambiguity.

Note that if you choose to build something as part of your seminar project, the thing that you prototype or propose embodies your "perspective or position" on the topic, and evidence from the prototype itself and its design process provides support for the position.

Schedule

We can adapt this schedule based on the interests and experiences of the class as the semester proceeds (I'm happy to entertain possibilities, so let me know).

The "background readings" are not required; they are meant to provide additional (albeit still preliminary) context for the associated reading approaches, and perhaps initial sources for a semester project in that area. As the semester proceeds, we can mutually decide how best to incorporate background.

Date	General Focus	Assignments	Specific Topics	Readings
Week 1, January 13	Introduction		Introductions Goals of the course and course structure Classificatory structure: hierarchical relationships between classes and principles of division; associative relationships between classes; enumerative vs. synthetic class structure; "folksonomic" structure	Classification Basics handout Beghtol, 2009 Furner, 2009 Grove, 2009
Week 2, January 20	Fundamentals of classification design (creating systems of related categories)		Review concepts from last week Semantic warrants (decisions about how classes are defined)	Beghtol, 1986 Mai, 2011 Hjorland and Albrechtsen, 1999 Broadfield, 1946 *Optional additions* Mills, 1964
Week 3, January 27			Melanie in Washington, DC no class	

Date	General Focus	Assignments	Specific Topics	Readings
Week 4, February 3	Fundamentals of classification design (creating systems of related categories)	Group 1 submit response paper #1 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, February 2, at 12:20 p.m.	Faceted classification (analytico-synthetic class definition); faceted browsing interfaces based on multiple property types Review previous weeks	Hunter, 2002 Vickery, 1960 Foskett, 1974 Kyle, 1958
Week 5, February 10	Classifying (placing items in categories	Group 2 submit response paper #1 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, February 9, at 12:20 p.m.	Deciding what a thing is (preparatory to classifying it) Concepts from biology: species Concepts from textual studies: works, documents, texts Concepts from cognitive science and linguistics: basic-level categories	Lakoff, 1984 (Ch. 1-2) Ereshevsky, 2007 Tanselle, 1989
Week 6, February 17	Classifying (placing items in categories)	Group 1 submit response paper #2 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, February 16, at 12:20 p.m.	Assigning things to classes (often, in information studies, determining what something is *about)* indexing and classifying: specificity and exhaustivity	Wilson, 1968 Frohmann, 1990 Hjorland, 1992 Mai, 2001
Week 7, February 24	Classifying (placing items in categories)	Group 2 submit response paper #2 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, February 23, at 12:20 p.m.	Relationships between items within classes Concepts from cognitive science and linguistics: prototypes and gradedness Concepts from cultural anthropology: art-culture square	Lakoff, 1984 (Ch. 3-4) Zerubavel, 1991 Clifford, 1986
Week 8, March 2	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 1 submit response paper #3 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, March 1, at 12:20 p.m.	Rhetoric	*Rhetoric applied to information systems* Feinberg, 2012 Lawrence, 2015 *Background material* Smith, 2004 Garver, 1994 Black, 1970

Date	General Focus	Assignments	Specific Topics	Readings
Week 9, March 9	Student project proposals	Everyone bring preliminary 1-page project proposals (with preliminary bibliography) to class (ungraded).	Discuss project proposals and how to write seminar papers.	
Week 10, March 16	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 2 submit response paper #3 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, March 15, at 12:20 p.m. Everyone bring revised 2-page project proposals to class (ungraded).	Genre theory	*Genre theory applied to information systems* Andersen, 2015 Macneil, 2015 Trace and Dillon, 2012 *Background material* Andersen, 2008 Miller, 1984 Yates, 1989
Week 11, March 23	no class, spring break			
Week 12, March 30	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 1 submit response paper #4 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, March 29, at 12:20 p.m.	Feminist theory Critical theory	*Feminist theory applied to information systems* Olson, 2007 Clement, 2015 *Critical theory applied to information systems* Day, 2008 *Background material* Benton and Craib, 2001, chapters 7, 8, 9 Haraway, 1988 Suchman, 1994

Date	General Focus	Assignments	Specific Topics	Readings
Week 13, April 6	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 2 submit response paper #4 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, April 5, at 12:20 p.m.	Historical analysis Philosophical analysis	*Historical analysis of information systems* Lee, 2012 Adler, 2015 *Philosophical analysis of information systems* Furner, 2012 Shaw, 2013 *Background material* Copi, Cohen, and McMahon, 2014, chapters 1 and 2 White, 1987
Week 14, April 13	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 1 submit response paper #5 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, April 14, at 12:20 p.m. Everyone bring paper outline, revised bibliography, and argument summary (ungraded).	Critical race theory Queer theory	*Critical race theory applied to information systems* Furner, 2007 *Queer theory applied to information systems* Cvetkovich, 2003 Drabinski, 2013 *Background material* Sedgwick, 1990 Scott, 1993 Bell, 1995
Week 15, April 20	Approaches to reading information systems	Group 2 submit response paper #5 to Sakai forum on Tuesday, April 19, at 12:20 p.m. Everyone bring paper preliminary draft (ungraded).	Materiality	*Material readings of information systems* Drucker, 2013 Mak, 2011 Knight, 2013 *Background material* Ingold, 2007

Date	General Focus	Assignments	Specific Topics	Readings
Week 16, April 27	Student project progress reports	Papers due Saturday, April 30, at noon (the scheduled time of the nonexistent final exam).		

Policies

Instructor communication
For specific and personal inquiries, e-mail is the most reliable means of contact for me. I do my best to answer e-mail within a day of receipt. If you do not receive a response after a few days, please follow up. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with "INLS 728."

My weekly office hours are a time when anyone can drop by to talk about anything without an appointment. But you are always welcome to make an appointment for a different time as well.

Academic integrity
The UNC Honor Code states that:

It shall be the responsibility of every student enrolled at the University of North Carolina to support the principles of academic integrity and to refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty...

This includes prohibitions against the following:

- Plagiarism.
- Falsification, fabrication, or misrepresentation of data or citations.
- Unauthorized assistance or collaboration.
- Cheating.

All scholarship builds on previous work, and all scholarship is a form of collaboration, even when working independently. Incorporating the work of others, and collaborating with colleagues, is welcomed in academic work. However, the honor code clarifies that you must always acknowledge when you make use of the ideas, words, or assistance of others in your work. This is typically accomplished through practices of reference, quotation, and citation.

If you are not certain what constitutes proper procedures for acknowledging the work of others, please ask the instructor for assistance. It is your responsibility to ensure that the honor code is appropriately followed.

Students with disabilities
Students with disabilities should request accommodations from the UNC office of Accessibility Resources and Service (https://accessibility.unc.edu/).

Late work
Late work is *not* acceptable.

For written assignments, ten percent of the possible points will be deducted from the score, with half points rounded up, for each day that the assignment is late. (A paper is one day late when its time of submission has passed. It remains one day late for 24 hours. If a paper due at noon is turned in at 12:30 p.m., it is one day late. If a paper due at noon is turned in at 11 a.m. the next day, it is one day late.)

Example: if a response paper is submitted after 12:20 p.m. on its due date, it will be worth 5 points maximum (.6 points rounded up to one point).

Extensions and "make-up" work
Extensions for project work may be granted under reasonable circumstances, *when negotiated with the instructor in advance.* A request for an extension minutes before a due date will likely be denied. A request for an extension made a month before the due date will be much better received.

Students who anticipate difficulties with completing work on time, or who encounter unexpected and severe challenges, should consult with the instructor as soon as possible so that alternate solutions can be discussed.

Citation policy and paper presentation details
All written work needs to properly acknowledge the ideas of others via in-text references, even when not directly quoting from a source.

However, when written projects includes references to material assigned for class, you do not need to include a separate list of full citations in addition to in-text references. (That is, if you have only made use of sources assigned for class, you don't need to create a Works Cited or References list at the end of your submitted essays. I know the citation information for the class materials already!)

While references to outside sources are not required for any project work in this class, if you make use of outside sources, then you must include full citations to those sources in your submitted work.

In making in-text references or preparing reference lists for outside sources, you may adopt any standard citation style you prefer (such as APA or the Chicago Manual of Style).

You may select whatever font, font size, margin, spacing, and other options that you like, as long as your paper is professionally presented. I will not actually count the words in your paper; directions about length are guidelines only.

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