

INLS 201

Foundations of Information Science

Basic Information

Date and time: Tu/Th 11am – 12:15pm

Location: Manning 307

Instructor Information

Instructor: Megan Winget

E-mail: megan.winget@unc.edu

Office: Manning 006 (on the garden level, around the corner from Manning 01)

Office hours: Thursdays 12:30 - 1:30

Anyone can come to office hours to discuss anything, without making an appointment in advance. It's a great time to ask questions about assignments, to ask for help, or just to say hello.

Course Objectives

From the SILS catalog:

INLS 201 – Foundations of Information Science: Examines the evolution of information science; information representation, organization and management; search and retrieval; human information seeking and interaction; organizational behavior and communication; policy, ethics and scholarly communications.

What that means in terms of this class:

The field known as “information science” involves the representation, storage, organization, retrieval and use of...well, “information”! But what is this “information”? This is a surprisingly complex question. If we think about some of the things that we might describe as “information”—documents like this syllabus, Web pages, photographs, tweets, books, podcasts, results of Google searches, event flyers stuck on telephone poles, the number of steps that is recorded by a Fitbit each day, Egyptian hieroglyphics painted on pyramid walls, text messages, video from surveillance cameras—these constitute an immense variety of form (images, text, video, sound) modality (digital pixels, physical paint) and access mechanism (to see an event flyer, you need to walk past it; to receive a text message, you need a smartphone). There are vast technical challenges to managing all of these diverse objects. Still, the technical aspects of information management are relatively concrete.

But there's yet another level to our understanding of information. What do all these different types of informational messages have in common? They are only useful when people decode them—when we understand what they mean. While the technical challenges associated with information management are significant, the challenges associated with meaning and interpretation are even more vexing. Questions of meaning are inherently uncertain, ambiguous, and contextual.

Information science, then, requires thinking on multiple levels. There is the conceptual level of understanding how messages come to acquire meaning and value, and there is the technical level of understanding how messages can be manipulated to enable practical goals. These conceptual and technical levels are tightly integrated and can't be understood in isolation. For example, we find it natural to look for information based on its topic, or its aboutness. But aboutness is a human judgment of meaning. While we can develop technical solutions to automate document retrieval that operate on relatively concrete document properties, such as word frequencies, these apparently concrete technical solutions are only approximations for human interpretive judgments. If we want to understand both the capabilities and limitations of technical solutions for information-related processes, we need to think about how people produce meaning, as well as about how computers can manipulate information objects.

In this course, we will examine conceptual and technical foundations of representing, organizing, retrieving, and using information. We will emphasize how the conceptual and technical bear upon each other. We will also explore how these integrations and frictions manifest in contemporary life.

The course is roughly organized into three parts. The first and third parts are more conceptually oriented, and the second part is more technically oriented.

- **Part 1** looks at core ideas of meaning, representation, and categorization.
- **Part 2** looks at mechanisms for modeling information computationally, to automate our interactions with information. (Our emphasis here is on understanding these mechanisms at a fundamental level, and not on implementing them.)
- **Part 3** looks at the effects of such computational models, and their associated emphasis on ranking and rating, in contemporary life.

Learning objectives

At the end of this course, you will:

- Be familiar with fundamental concepts and concerns associated with information studies.
- Be able to relate these concepts and concerns to current events, situations, and technologies.
- Be prepared to succeed in further SILS coursework.

Grading

Students will be assessed based on the following elements:

- Three take-home exams for 100 points each
 - Midterm 1: Distributed: September 17 / Due September 26 (in-class)

- Midterm 2: Distributed: October 29 / Due November 7 (in-class)
- Final: in-class – December 3
- Participation: 100 points
 - 40 points – Blogging (4 blog entries throughout the semester for 5 points each, comment on 4 blog entries for 5 points each)
 - 60 points – In-Class Participation

There are a total of 400 points.

Final grades will be assigned according to the following schedule:

A	384 to 400
A-	360 to 383
B+	348 to 359
B	336 to 347
B-	320 to 335
C+	308 to 319
C	296 to 307
C-	280 to 295
D+	268 to 279
D	240 to 267
F	<240

Honor Code & Other Policies

Instructor communication

For specific, concrete questions, e-mail is the most reliable means of contact for me. During the week (Monday 9 a.m. – Friday 5 p.m.) You should receive a response within 24 hours. Weekends or holidays might take 2 or 3 days. If you do not receive a response by Monday at noon, please follow up. Please keep this in mind when you are scheduling your own activities, especially those related to exam preparation. If you wait until the day before an exam is due to ask me a clarification question, there is a good chance that you will not receive a response before the exam.

It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with “INLS 201.” Please use complete sentences and professional language in your e-mail.

For more complicated questions or help, come to office hours (right after class) (no appointment necessary!) or make an appointment to talk with me at a different time via WhenWorks (<https://when.works/meganwinget>). I cannot discuss grades over e-mail; if you have a question about grading, you must talk with me in person.

You are welcome to call me by my first name (“Megan”). However, you may also use “Dr. Winget” or “Professor Winget” if that is more comfortable for you. Either is fine.

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:

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

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. (The [UNC Office of Student Conduct](#) provides a variety of honor code resources.)

The UNC Libraries has online tutorials on [citation practices](#) and [plagiarism](#) that you might find helpful.

Students with disabilities

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

Schedule

(Available online at: <https://inls201.winget.web.unc.edu/schedule/>)

Acknowledgements and thanks

This syllabus includes elements of INLS 201 sections taught by Diane Kelly, Ron Bergquist, Melanie Feinberg and Ryan Shaw.