

INLS 520: Organization of Information Spring 2021

Basic information

Date and time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:25 p.m. to 2:40 p.m.

Location: Manning 304

Instructor information

Instructor: Melanie Feinberg

E-mail: mfeinber@unc.edu

Student hours: Mondays 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. (in the office) or Mondays 4 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. (via Zoom; link available in Sakai)

Introduction

In INLS 520, we examine fundamental concepts of organizing systems. These concepts transcend particular implementations or professional contexts. INLS 520 will help you to understand, use, explain, create, assess, and interrogate any organizing system. You will be able to use what you learn in INLS 520 in all your classes at SILS, and in all information professions—and throughout your daily life as well.

Organizing systems attempt to make an unruly, messy, and ambiguous world appear systematic and orderly—**but they fail, every time.** For INLS 520, this means that easy answers are impossible, and you cannot find refuge in following rules. Some of you may find this to be disquieting. Ultimately, however, I hope that you will also find inspiration in this state of affairs. The data that we create with our organizing systems will always be somewhat terrible, but we likewise have the power to shape and change it, in ways both large and small.

Learning objectives

At the end of this course, you will *understand*:

- Elements of organizing systems:
 - Things (entities, resources, items, phenomena...).
 - Categories (attributes, dimensions, properties, elements, fields...).
 - Values (terms, tags, descriptors, categories...).
 - Relationships (between things, between categories, between values).
- The complex integration of organizing systems throughout our forms of life—social, cultural, scientific, technical.
- The inherent instability, ambiguity, and arbitrariness of any organizing system.

At the end of this course, you will *be able to*:

- Design and implement an organizing system.
- Explain how organizing systems work.
- Critically interrogate how organizing systems present the world around us.

Course structure

This is an in-person course, meeting twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. The course is organized into 16 units; one unit for each week of the semester.

Class sessions will primarily involve participatory activities: discussions, games, questions and answers, project work. Before each class session, preparatory tasks might include readings, prerecorded lectures, and incremental progress on course projects.

Material for each unit will have its own page in Sakai. Each unit page will be posted after class on Wednesdays. All preparatory tasks for each class session will be fully documented on the unit page. Materials for in-class activities will also be integrated into the unit page. (Sometimes, these materials will be added to Sakai after class, but sometimes they will be available before class.)

When a unit is over, its page be available in Sakai through the Previous Units tab, so that you can refer to it throughout the semester.

The Semester Calendar (below) provides an overview of each unit.

Assessment and Grading

This class will not employ conventional grades or scores.

Basic requirements

To pass the course, you must complete the following four components in line with that component's criteria for success.

- Participation.
- Project #1: Descriptive schema.
- Project #2: Taxonomy.
- Project #3: Explanation.

See the Project Details tab in Sakai for complete instructions, deliverables, and success criteria.

Project assessment

For each project, you will receive a set of qualitative comments. These comments will be oriented around the project's criteria for success. **If a project does not satisfy the success criteria to a minimal proficiency standard, you will be invited to resubmit the project.**

Participation assessment

We will develop participation success criteria and ground rules together as a class.

Participation will primarily be assessed through self-reflection. You will submit both a midterm and final self-assessment that considers your participation against the success criteria.

Final course grades for graduate students

All graduate students who complete the four course components to minimal proficiency standards will receive a P.

Final course grades for undergraduate students

All undergraduate students will submit a semester self-assessment that makes a case for the final grade they should receive.

As a baseline, all undergraduates who complete all four course components to minimum proficiency standards will receive a B.

In your self-assessment, you will propose a grade for yourself against this baseline. (I will reserve the right to change your proposed grade if you do not have sufficient evidence—e.g., from your project

feedback, and from your participation self-assessments—to support it.) Instructions for undergraduate self-assessments are available in the Project Details tab on Sakai.

Due dates

<i>Course component</i>	<i>Due date</i>
Project 1: Descriptive schema	Wednesday, September 29
Midterm participation self-assessment	Monday, October 4
Project 2: Taxonomy	Wednesday, October 27
Project 3: Organizing system explanation	Saturday, December 4, at noon (The scheduled time of the final exam, as per UNC policy)
Final participation self-assessment	Saturday, December 4, at noon
Final semester self-assessment (undergraduates only)	Saturday, December 4, at noon

All assignments should be submitted as a PDF document in the Assignments tab of Sakai.

For citation policies and other general requirements for written work, see the Project Details tab in Sakai.

Late work

Late work is accepted without penalty.

If you cannot make a deadline, send an e-mail to inform me when you plan to submit your completed assignment. I appreciate being informed about your intention to submit late work as soon as possible, and ideally well before the scheduled due date. In your e-mail, you just need to tell me when you intend to submit your work. You don't need to explain your circumstances or apologize.

If you don't send me an e-mail and don't turn in a project, I will contact you instead. I won't be angry or anything; I'll just ask you to tell me when you anticipate turning in the project.

The later that projects are submitted, the less time I will have to provide feedback on them, so keep this in mind. **You'll get fewer comments—or potentially no comments—when you turn things in late.** This will be especially true at the end of the semester. Additionally, because UNC has strict deadlines for final grade submission, late final projects may necessitate that you receive an IN (Incomplete) grade.

Semester Calendar

This calendar is subject to modification as the semester proceeds. (Project details and due dates won't change, but a reading or two might, or a supplementary activity.) For complete instructions for each unit, see its page in Sakai, as that unit becomes available.

All readings are available via that unit's tab in Sakai. However, although our final reading—Mark Doty's *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*—is provided as an electronic resource via UNC Libraries, I recommend purchasing a print copy if you can. It's just nicer in print! (You can get it via Amazon or other sources.)

Unit 1
Introduction
Before class on August 18
<i>Read</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syllabus
In class on August 18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome: introductions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation: syllabus overview and logistics • Tour: what is where in Sakai • Lecture: What is information organization? • (Depending on time) Participation criteria and discussion ground rules 	
Unit 2 Thinking about things, systematically	
Before class on August 23 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kent <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: What is a street? In class on August 23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation criteria and discussion ground rules • Game: apple pie • Examples: Shark attacks, etc 	Before class on August 25 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilson • Buckland <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Works, texts, and documents • Lecture: Descriptive schema project overview In class on August 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Wilson and Buckland • Game: Work it out • Descriptive schema project: Q&A
Unit 3 Thinking about things, cognitively	
Before class on August 30 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lakoff <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: prototype effects In class on August 30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive demonstrations of prototype effects 	Before class on September 1 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributes and values (handout) • Gilliland • Dublin Core <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Attributes and values In class on September 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game: Attributes in Action • Project group time
Unit 4 Thinking about things, culturally	
No class on September 6: Labor Day holiday	Before class on September 8 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basso • Zerubavel <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Cognition and metaphor Before class on September 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: culture, categorization, and conflict • Project group time
Unit 5 Thinking about things, scientifically	
Before class on September 13 <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ereshefsky • Notes on biological taxonomy (to help with Ereshefsky) <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: species concepts • Lecture: schema vs. taxonomy In class on September 13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Ereshefsky • Game: Are they human? 	Before class on September 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coyle • Disambiguation handout (short) <i>Listen</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: disambiguation and identifiers In class on September 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: names and identifiers • Project group time

Unit 6 Thinking about things systematically, in practice	
<p>Before class on September 20</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bowker and Star <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: implementing information infrastructure <p>In class on September 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Bowker and Star 	<p>Before class on September 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for schema project peer review <p>In class on September 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schema project peer review
Unit 7 Coordinating our thinking about things	
<p>Before class on September 27</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Star and Griesemer • Shavit and Griesemer <p><i>Listen</i></p> <p>Lecture: boundary objects</p> <p>In class on September 27</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: boundary objects 	<p>Schema project due on September 29</p> <p>In class on September 29</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-term reflection • Taxonomy project overview
Unit 8 Putting things together: For what purpose? (a traditional view)	
<p>Before class on October 4</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rayward <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: World peace through taxonomy <p>In class on October 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Paul Otlet 	<p>Before class on October 6</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification basics (handout) <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: taxonomy basics <p>In class on October 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game: taxonomy puzzles • Project group time
Unit 9 Putting things together: On what basis? (a traditional view)	
<p>Before class on October 11</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mai <p>In class on October 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Mai • Game: the perils of plurality 	<p>Before class on October 13</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunter <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Faceted classification and faceted navigation <p>In class on October 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game: Taxonomy puzzles redux • Questions: faceted classification and faceted navigation • Project group time
Unit 10 Putting things together: On what basis? (alternate views)	
<p>Before class on October 18</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lee <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Breaking down the Seven Epitomes 	<p>Before class on October 20</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Littletree, Belarde-Lewis, and Duarte <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Indigenous knowledge organization

<p>In class on October 18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Lee 	<p>In class on October 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Littletree, Belarde-Lewis, and Duarte
<p>Unit 11 Putting things together: On what basis? (another alternate view)</p>	
<p>Before class on October 25</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equivalence (handout) <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Equivalence relationships <p>In class on October 25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxonomy project peer review 	<p>Taxonomy project due on October 27</p> <p>In class on October 27</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking in and catching up
<p>Unit 12 Putting things together: On what basis? (another alternate view)</p>	
<p>Before class on November 1</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clifford • Cvetkovich • Four museums, two archives handout <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Four museums, two archives <p>In class on November 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Clifford and Cvetkovich • Investigation: two museums, two archives 	<p>Before class on November 3</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation project details <p>In class on November 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation project overview
<p>Unit 13 Putting things together automatically</p>	
<p>Before class on November 8</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maron <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: probabilistic information retrieval <p>In class on November 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game: training a machine learning algorithm • Discussion: automatic vs. manual classificatory techniques 	<p>In class on November 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation project practice exercise
<p>Unit 14 Another look at ambiguity: how facts are made</p>	
<p>Before class on November 15</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D'Ignazio and Klein • Haider and Sundin <p>In class on November 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: Creating facts 	<p>In class on November 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation project practice exercise • Project group time
<p>Unit 15 Another look at ambiguity: mushrooms</p>	
<p>Before class on November 22</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tsing <p><i>Listen</i></p>	<p>No class on November 24; Thanksgiving holiday</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: Matsutake worlds <p>In class on November 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: mushrooms 	
<p>Unit 16 Another look at ambiguity: poetry</p>	
<p>Before class on November 29</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doty <p><i>Listen</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture: still life with data <p>In class on November 29</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion: still life • Checking in and looking back 	<p>In class on December 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation project peer review

Course policies

COVID-19 community standards and mask use

As specified by current UNC community standards, all enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community—your classmates and me—as we learn together.

If you choose not to wear a mask, or if you wear your mask improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the Office of Student Conduct. At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. (Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception.) For additional information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/community-standards/#chapter-2>

Respectful class environment

Learning requires an atmosphere of respect, care, and empathy for each other. This does not mean that we can't disagree; understanding the nature of our disagreements can help us all grow. But disrespect for any person or their identity will not be tolerated.

Asking for help

Information organization is confusing, and it often doesn't seem to make sense. If you are confused, it does not mean you are lazy or stupid. I encourage asking questions in class. Please feel empowered to do so at any time.

Additionally, should you encounter barriers to your learning—whether it's something that I'm doing or not doing, or challenges in your personal circumstances—I am here to help. Please set up an appointment so that we can work together towards your success.

No busy work

No one wants to do boring things for no reason, including me! From my perspective, everything that we do in this class has a purpose that requires thinking. If anything seems like busy work, I probably haven't articulated the purpose well. Be sure to ask for help, so that I can better explain what the task is supposed to achieve.

Instructor communication

For specific, concrete questions, e-mail is the most reliable means of contact for me. 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 520."

For more complicated questions or help, come to student hours (no appointment necessary) or make an appointment to talk with me at a different time.

You are welcome to call me by my first name ("Melanie"). However, you may also use "Dr. Feinberg" or "Professor Feinberg" if that is more comfortable for you.

Student hours

During student hours, I am available to talk with students about anything, without an appointment.

You can use student hours to ask questions, seek help, consult about project work, obtain more information about course topics, or just say hello. You're not bothering me if you attend student hours! I've dedicated this time to talk with students.

If you attend in-person student hours, my office door will be open; simply come in! If I'm talking with someone else, make sure that I know you're there.

If you attend Zoom student hours, and my video is not on, I'm just working in another program. Start talking and I'll switch to Zoom!

Inclusive learning and accessibility

I want everyone to do well in this class. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know. We'll work together on strategies to meet your needs and satisfy the requirements of the course.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Web site (ars.unc.edu) for details.

Attendance

Attendance standards will be determined by the participation success criteria that we define as a class.

However, note that peer review is a required component of the three course projects. If you miss a class session that includes time for peer review, it is your responsibility to coordinate with your project group to find a way to conduct peer review—for your project and for your group members' projects.

Mental health resources

All students have access to counseling and other resources through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building.

Basic needs

If you are navigating financial, health, or housing challenges that may have an impact on your ability to thrive at UNC, one resource is the Dean of Students, which also oversees the Dean's Emergency Fund: <https://dos.unc.edu/student-support/student-emergency-and-hardship-funds/>

If you are struggling with food insecurity and you are in the Chapel Hill area, you can get assistance through Carolina Cupboard, an on-campus food pantry: <http://carolinacupboard.web.unc.edu/>

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. (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.

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