

# INLS 500: HUMAN INFORMATION INFORMATICS

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Manning Hall 205  
5:45 - 8:30 PM, Tuesdays  
Online: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/91717395082>

## Course Description

The behavioral and cognitive activities of those who interact with information, with emphasis on the role of information mediators. How information needs are recognized and resolved; the

ecological context of information use and dissemination. Contemporary social problems around information, people, groups and institutions.



### Aims

This course will explore contemporary social problems that shape how people can access and use information in a complex world with competing goals, unequal access, and limited resources. We will focus on how politics, power, and economics influence information mediators and cultural institutions with a public mission.

Readings draw heavily from the academic essay genre. We will explore how the academic essay synthesizes and communicates scholarly and expert information for

different audiences. The final assignment -- the major assignment of this course -- is producing an academic essay that explores the political, economic and cultural impact of two types of “libraries”.

### Teaching Philosophy

This is a graduate level seminar. I expect that you want to be here. That means demonstrating strong intrinsic motivation to complete readings and engage with class discussion. I believe that discussion and collaboration are the foundational principles of an advanced liberal arts degree. In graduate school, “grades” are the bare minimum of assessment (and not even a good assessment tool at that). If grades are your primary motivation, this class will feel different. As a discussion-based and reading intensive course, you will have significant commitments before each class meeting. I recommend reading guides and thought experiments to prepare for class throughout the course reading schedule. I aim to include different kinds of engagement. You can speak up in class. You can also participate in the class’s backchannel (IMing in Zoom chat). Additionally, you can send me reflections via email, social media content, video of your interpretative dance and other forms of engagement that I have not yet imagined.

## Important Dates & Information

No Class: Sept 6, Oct. 11, Oct. 25, or Nov. 22

Last class session: Nov. 29

### ASSIGNMENTS

In-class prep assignments are due to me after class. You submit them online in Sakai. The document must have a name WITHIN THE DOCUMENT TEXT to receive credit. I grade for completeness. You receive a yes/no for submitting the assignment.

Response papers are due the Friday before the corresponding class session meets. Name, submission guidelines are the same. I grade these for engagement with the material and clarity. I use the university grading scale.

See my teaching philosophy on grades and participation. I expect participation. I expect you to get an A. I deduct progress towards an A based on the quality of your engagement with the course.

The final assignment is a comparative case study of Little Free Libraries and the Imagination Library. The case study should address the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of each. You should consider if either or both constitutes a “social problem”, as we have defined it in class. You should bring in 3-5 outside sources. You may also include assigned readings as sources but they are not outside sources. You are to approach this as an [academic essay](#). That means advancing an argument using clear language and data/evidence.

# Weekly Schedule

## August 16 - Humans, Information, & Social Problems

Reading: Syllabus

## August 23 - Job, Vocation, or Social Role? What is a “librarian”? An “information worker”?

### Reading:

- Vocational Awe And Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves ([Etterah](#) 2018)
- “Information Has Value”: The Political Economy Of Information Capitalism ([Ellenwood](#) 2020)

**Assignment:** 750-1200 word educational bio. Friday, the 19th, by 10 PM.

## August 30 - Politics, Power, Economics, Information & Behavior

### Reading:

- A Political Economy Of Librarianship ([Birdsall](#) 2000)
- The Commodification Of Information And The Public Good: New Challenges For A Progressive Librarianship ([Trosow](#) 2015)
- Book Review: Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Underclass ([Sheskatofsky](#) 2019)

**Assignment:** Prepare 1-2 paragraphs for class about what you consider the greatest social problem in librarianship.

## Sept. 13 - The Challenge of Curiosity

### Reading:

- Curiosity, Browsing & Online Environments ([Deitering](#) 2014)
- Episode 4: What You Think Is What You Find ([Does Not Compute Podcast](#), 2021)
- Google is Giving Search Data to the Police ([Ng](#) 2020)

**Assignment:** Prepare 1-2 paragraphs for class describing the politics and economics of

“curiosity” in the information economy.

Sept. 20 - Cognition Theories, Meritocracy, & The Issue of Grit

**Reading:**

- The Problem with Grit: Dismantling Deficit Thinking in Library Instruction ([Tewell 2020](#))
- Education Technology and the New Behaviorism ([Watters 2017](#))
- Deconstructing information literacy discourse: Peeling back the layers in higher education ([Hicks & Lloyd 2021](#))

Sept. 27 - The Political Economy of Hope

**Reading:**

- “The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope” (Greene 2021) Available in the library and from booksellers.

**Assignment:** Prepare 2-3 paragraphs for class that identifies & deconstructs 2-3 information users or behaviors from Greene’s field sites. Submit at the end of class.

Oct. 4 - The Problems and Potential of Platforms in Public Good Institutions

**Reading:**

- Resolution on the Misuse of Behavioral Data Surveillance in Libraries ([ALA 2021](#))
- Proposal to install spyware in university libraries to protect copyrights shocks academics ([Mehta 2020](#))
- Datafication meets platformization: Materializing Data Processes in Teaching & Learning ([Pangrazio, Stornaiuolo et al 2022](#))

Oct. 18 - Policing & Cultural Institutions

**Reading:**

- No Holds Barred: Policing And Security In The Public Library ([Robinson 2019](#))
- The Rise of Law Enforcement on College Campuses ([Anderson 2015](#))
- Challenges and Accomplishments in U.S. Prison Libraries ([Lehmann 2011](#))

**Assignment:** Prepare 1-3 paragraphs on the history and current structure of the UNC police.

### Nov. 1 - Social Problems & Little Free Libraries

#### **Reading:**

- Little Free Libraries® Interrogating the impact of the branded book exchange ([Schmidt & Hale](#) 2017)
- The Question of LFLs ([Cottrell](#) 2018)
- An examination of spatial inequalities in the provision of Little Free Libraries (LFLs) in Spokane, Washington ([Houghton, Gunderson & Gautum](#) 2022)

### Nov. 8: Philanthrocapitalism & Dolly Parton’s “Imagination Library”

#### **Reading:**

- Making sense in the city: Dolly Parton, early reading and educational policy-making ([Hall & Jones](#) 2015)
- Penguin Random House Authors and Creators Skew Heavily White ([Milliott](#) 2021)
- Ethical Financial Stewardship: One Library’s Examination Of Vendors’ Business Practices ([DiVittorio & Gianelli](#), 2015)

**Assignment:.** Case study analyzing the political economy of LFLs and IL.

### Nov. 15 - Consumer-Students & Competing Missions in Libraries at For-Profit Colleges

- Academic Libraries, Veterans, and For-Profit Higher Education Exploiting the Vulnerable ([Irwin](#) 2016)
- Academic Libraries in For-Profit Schools of Higher Education ([Davis, Adam, & Harvesty](#) 2017)

### Nov. 29 - Emerging Social Problems

#### **Reading:**

- Tentatively: “The Propagandists’ Playbook” ([Tripodi](#) 2022)

**Assignment:.** Case study analyzing the political economy of LFLs and IL. Due by Dec. 2.

