

INLS 777: Perspectives on People, Information, and Technology Fall 2023

Basic information

Date and time: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Location: Manning 307

Instructor information

Instructor: Melanie Feinberg (she, her, hers)

E-mail: mfeinber@unc.edu

Office: Manning 024 (on the garden level, aka the basement)

Student hours: Wednesdays, 3-4 p.m. in my office, or by appointment via Zoom

Introduction

This course, required of all SILS master's students, explores different conceptions of information, technology, and people—the putative focus of “our field” of information science—as articulated through both historical and current scholarship. Our focus will be relentlessly comparative: we will seek to understand, for instance, how certain ideas and perspectives appear across academic and professional contexts and, equally, how ideas and perspectives from the past prefigure those of the present. In particular, we will seek to understand how concepts put forth in relation to one configuration of information, technology, and people might speak to other, very different configurations. In making these comparisons, we will seek to identify shifts and changes, as well as what remains stable.

Concurrently, as we engage with these diverse scholarly texts, you will consider how various instantiations and arrangements of information, technology, and people might figure into your own professional goals.

A note on terminology: For lack of a better alternative, I use the term “information science” to encompass the set of concerns, concepts, aspirations, and inspirations that unite us as members of an information school community. Information science, in this conception, includes librarianship, data science, human-computer interaction, archives, and more. It's the biggest of tents!

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Appreciate the diverse range of disciplines, professions, and other orientations by which people have attempted to make sense of information, technology, and people.
- Contextualize, critique, and compare disciplinary, professional, cultural, and other perspectives with which one might identify and interpret relations between information, technology, and people.
- Trace different ways of understanding current information problems through the lens of different perspectives.
- Examine how your own interests and goals intersect, align, and conflict with different disciplinary, professional, cultural, and other perspectives.
- Articulate your own emerging professional identity.

All sections of INLS 777 have similar learning objectives. However, each instructor may take a different approach to accomplish these objectives. Content will vary significantly across the sections, so don't be surprised if your colleagues do not have the same readings and assignments.

Course materials

We will use the Canvas learning management system.

All course materials will be available in Canvas modules. Readings, recorded lectures, class plans, and other materials will be posted each week, typically on Wednesday afternoons.

Assigned work will be submitted via the Assignments area of Canvas, and complete instructions for all assigned work will also be available there.

Course structure

Our time together will focus on discussion, games, and other forms of interaction. You will be expected to have read the assigned materials before class and be prepared to talk about them. When possible, recorded lectures will be made available with the readings, to help prepare for class (rather than delivered in class).

The amount of reading for this class is relatively light (there is an average of 50 pages per week for the semester, with the greatest number of pages per week being 93 and the least 23—yes, I counted!). But the reading may seem tough at first. It will often employ technical terminology, for instance—and the technology will vary from reading to reading (sometimes it will be “old” technology, like “indexing,” and sometimes it will be “new” technology, like NFTs). But we will learn to read *beyond* these immediate contexts, and so to surface the big ideas from the jargon-y gunk in which they are encrusted. I hope that you will consider this an exciting prospect! It is, for sure, an invaluable professional skill.

Requirements, grading, and assessment

Requirements

There are five course requirements:

- Four short reflection papers.
- Participation (collegiality points).

An overview of these requirements appears below. Complete instructions are available in the Assignments area of Canvas.

Assessment and grading

In alignment with Graduate School policies, graduate students will be assessed on a Pass/Fail basis.

To receive a P, you must:

- Complete the four reflection papers to minimum proficiency standards, as assessed via each paper’s documented success criteria and set of deliverables.
- Accrue eight collegiality points over the course of the semester and document these in a brief report.

All submitted work will receive written comments. My review will be informed by each project’s documented success criteria. *There will be no scores or grades.*

If an assignment

- Does not include the specified set of deliverables
- Fails to fulfill the documented success criteria to a minimum standard of proficiency

the assignment must be revised and resubmitted in order to obtain a P. (This kind of problem typically involves some misunderstanding of the success criteria or deliverables.) Should this occur, I will explain the problem and provide written guidance for a successful resubmission.

Late work

There are no penalties for late work. Should you need extra time to complete an assignment, simply send me an e-mail with your new due date. In your e-mail, you don't need to explain your circumstances or apologize. Just inform me when you plan to submit the work.

Late work will receive fewer comments than work submitted on time, and it may take longer for late work to be assessed. Excessively late work may receive no comments at all.

Because UNC has strict deadlines for final grade submission, late final papers may necessitate that you receive an IN (Incomplete) grade.

Due dates

Reflection paper #1	Wednesday, September 20
Reflection paper #2	Wednesday, October 18
Reflection paper #3	Monday, November 15
Collegiality points report	Wednesday, December 6
Reflection paper #4	Friday, December 15, at noon (The scheduled time of the final exam, as per UNC policy)

Assigned work should be submitted via the Assignments area of Canvas. Requirements, deliverables, and success criteria are fully documented there.

Overview of course requirements

Reflection papers

You will write four brief essays (around 1000 words each) over the course of the semester.

In each of these essays, you will:

- Identify an idea, concept, or theme from the course that is of particular interest to you.
- Explain and situate that idea, concept, or theme via substantial reference to at least two course readings, one published before 2000, and one published after 2000.
- Explore that idea, concept or theme in relation to your own interests, goals, and aspirations.

The primary goal with these essays is to *reflect*, not to regurgitate: to consider the ways in which ideas, concepts, and themes from the academic discipline of information science intersect with your own professional and personal context.

Complete instructions for each essay, including criteria for success and specifications for deliverables, will be available in the Assignments area of Canvas.

Participation

We're all in this together! In a course that emphasizes interactive learning, it's important that we all find ways to contribute to our mutual learning and well-being. Accordingly, to pass the class, you must *acquire at least eight collegiality points throughout the semester.*¹

Some ways to obtain collegiality points include:

- *Consistently* doing the assigned reading and being prepared for class discussion.
- *Generally* fulfilling the discussion success criteria (these criteria are documented in Canvas).
- Facilitating a small-group discussion: getting the conversation started, keeping the group on task, ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak, synthesizing ideas, and so on.
- Serving as the “devil’s advocate” in a small-group discussion by articulating opinions or objections that you do not personally share, but that extend the conversation in interesting ways. (This involves acting as the persistent devil’s advocate for an entire class, rather than just making a single remark.)
- Acting as the reporter for a small-group discussion, presenting what the group talked about to the class as a whole.
- Contributing an idea, comment, or question to a discussion that involves the entire class (rather than a small group).
- Writing up thoughts about a course reading, lecture, discussion, or other activity as a Canvas discussion post.
- Reflecting on a recent news item or everyday experience that expands upon topics germane to the class as a Canvas discussion post.
- Sharing your knowledge with others: for example, helping to explain a reading, discussion topic, or something else from class to a colleague (either as part of a small-group interaction or outside of class).
- Soliciting knowledge from others: for example, asking a fellow student (or me) for help when you don’t understand something (again, either as part of class or outside of class).

Have an idea for some other way to obtain collegiality points? Great! Propose your idea to me and we’ll see about adding it to the list.

I will not keep track of your collegiality points; you will. At the end of the semester, you will submit a report that lists what you’ve done. This will not be onerous if you keep track throughout the semester.

Also note that, although I encourage you to perform these activities whenever you can, you only need to tell me about *eight* of them. So your report can just tell me your eight *favorite* collegiality items (or the *first* eight), and not all 45 things that you did. In other words, if you want, you can get this report completed early in the semester and be done with it (as long as you don’t have more than two unexcused absences, as explained below).

Attendance

In a class that prioritizes student interaction, being absent affects the learning experience of others. Therefore, attendance is required.

There are two types of absences: excused and unexcused.

¹ The idea for collegiality points is liberally adapted from Max Liboiron via Megan Winget.

Unexcused absences

Everyone is allowed two unexcused absences for the semester. An unexcused absence is when you are away from class for any reason.

If you have more than two unexcused absences in the semester, you must obtain one extra collegiality point for each unexcused absence. (For instance, if you have 4 unexcused absences for the semester, you will need 10 collegiality points, rather than 8, in order to get a P.)

You do not need to inform me of unexcused absences.

Excused absences

If you have a good reason to miss class, you can request an excused absence. You don't need to obtain an extra collegiality point for an excused absence.

Acceptable reasons for excused absences include:

- Ill health (physical or mental).
- Family emergencies (your child is sick, your partner is in the hospital).
- Accidents and unanticipated disasters (your apartment floods, your car is stolen, etc).
- Religious holidays.

To obtain an excused absence, send me an e-mail with your reason for being absent. *Do not go into detail about your personal circumstances, just tell me the basic reason (e.g., "I would like an excused absence because I'm not feeling well today," "I would like an excused absence because I will be observing Eid-al-Fitr," etc.).*

As a rule of thumb, if it would seem wrong for me to cancel class for that reason, it's probably not an acceptable excuse.

Keeping track of absences

You are responsible for tracking your own unexcused absences and adjusting your collegiality points accordingly.

Please be aware that misrepresenting your unexcused absences would be a violation of the honor code (see the course policies below for more about the honor code).

Semester calendar

Each weekly module in Canvas will include *reading overviews* to help you understand why I've selected a text and what I envision us learning from it.

Date	Themes	Readings
Monday, August 21	Introduction to the class	Syllabus
Part 1: Information		
Wednesday, August 23	Information: what is it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floridi, 2010 (pp19-51) • Buckland, 1991 • Agre, 1994 41 pages
Monday, August 28	Conceptualizing information retrieval and its evaluation, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bush, 1945 • Cleverdon, 1967 30 pages
Wednesday, August 30	Conceptualizing information retrieval and its evaluation, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capra and Arguello, 2019 • Tripodi, 2022 (pp 101-125) • Capra and Arguello, 2023 37 pages
Monday, September 4	<i>Labor Day holiday: no classes scheduled</i>	
Wednesday, September 6	Purposes of information systems, Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilson, 1968 (chapter 2) • Soergel, 1997 23 pages
Monday, September 11	Purposes of information systems, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hjørland, 2015 • Shah and Bender, 2022 24 pages
Wednesday, September 13	Information systems and automation, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maron, 1961 • Cooper, 1978 25 pages
Monday, September 18	Information systems and automation, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burrell, 2016 • Gillespie, 2020 14 pages
Wednesday, September 20	Temporality in information systems, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairthorne, 1974 • Bowker, 2005 (pp. 173-184) 18 pages
Monday, September 25	<i>UNC wellbeing day; no classes scheduled</i>	
Wednesday, September 27	Temporality in information systems, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christen and Anderson, 2019 27 pages
Monday, October 2	Design specifications for datasets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bates, 1976 • Gebru, et al, 2018 29 pages
Wednesday, October 4	Implementing data design specifications, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tinker, 1966 • Furnas, Landauer, Gomez, and Dumais 1987 14 pages

Date	Themes	Readings
Monday, October 9	Implementing data design specifications, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muller, et al 2021 • Geiger, et al, 2021 <p>40 pages</p>
Wednesday, October 11	Reliability and authenticity of information, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duchein, 1983 • Duranti, 1995 • Lynch, 1997 <p>28 pages</p>
Monday, October 16	Reliability and authenticity of information, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lemieux, 2019 • Dash, 2021 <p>28 pages</p>
Wednesday, October 18	Relationships between documents, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garfield, 1955 • de Solla Price, 1965 • Larson, 1996 • Brin and Page, 1998 <p>28 pages</p>
Monday, October 23	Relationships between documents, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starbird, 2017 • Kwon, 2022 • Citational Justice Collective, 2022 <p>16 pages</p>
Wednesday, October 25	Relationships between documents, part 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egan and Shera, 1952 • DiResta, 2018 <p>16 pages</p>
Part 2: People		
Monday, October 30	Serving users, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gould and Lewis, 1985 • Woolgar, 1990 • Baumer and Brubaker, 2017 <p>60 pages</p>
Wednesday, November 1	Serving users, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Card, Moran, and Newell, 1980 • Greenberg and Buxton, 2008 • Light, Shklovski, and Powell, 2017 <p>33 pages</p>
Monday, November 6	Design, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross, 1982 • Ehn and Kyng, 1987 <p>48 pages</p>
Wednesday, November 8	Design, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarke, 2018 <p>18 pages</p>
Monday, November 13	Design, part 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bray et al, 2022 • Khovanskaya and Sengers, 2019 <p>22 pages</p>
Wednesday, November 15	Users in context, part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatman, 1996 • Gibson and Martin, 2019 <p>24 pages</p>
Monday, November 20	Users in context, part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grudin, 1988 • Star and Ruhleder, 1996 <p>30 pages</p>

Date	Themes	Readings
Wednesday, November 22	<i>Thanksgiving holiday; no classes scheduled</i>	
Monday, November 27	Users in context, part 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dourish, 2006 • Currie, Paris, Pasquetto, and Pierre, 2016 21 pages
Part 3: Professional ideologies		
Wednesday, November 29	Professional identity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harris, 1973 • Garrison, 1972 • Jones, 2017 65 pages
Monday, December 4	Professional expertise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bates, 2000 • Ribes, Hoffman, Slota, and Bowker 2019 33 pages
Wednesday, December 6	Professional futures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaw, 2019

Course policies

COVID-19 and mask use

As specified by current UNC community standards, everyone at UNC is encouraged to be fully vaccinated and to receive any eligible boosters.

Mask use is optional in university buildings.

Please do not come to class if you are sick. Any illness is always an excused absence. Although this class does not offer a remote option, class materials will be posted to Canvas so that you will have access to them, even if you are ill.

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

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.

The work that we will be engaging with this semester is difficult, and most of you will be unfamiliar with some or all of it. It is normal to feel confused or lost sometimes.

Additionally, we are living in challenging times, and we are all grappling with chronic stress and anxiety. It is common and natural to feel overwhelmed. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or failure.

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 777.”

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.

During 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 outside waiting.)

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.

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.

If you are concerned about a fellow student's wellbeing, one option is to consult the Dean of Students: <https://dos.unc.edu/urgent-concerns/>

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-funds/>

If you are struggling with food insecurity, SILS has a food pantry in the student lounge on the second floor of Manning Hall; feel free to take what you need (or donate items for others). Carolina Cupboard is another 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.

Honor code violations can result in serious penalties, such as failing the course.

Use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT

You *may* use generative AI tools as a study aid, but you should be very careful regarding the responses that you might receive. ChatGPT, for instance, is quite apt to provide inaccurate or misleading information if you were to ask it, say, to summarize the findings and significance of the Cranfield tests. These responses typically sound quite reasonable, even when they are absolutely wrong. So beware!

In terms of assigned written work, you must submit a disclosure statement that documents *all* the different ways that you used generative AI tools. As part of your documentation, you should include links to *all* the conversations that you may have had with chat-based tools.

Additionally, if you

- Incorporate direct quotations from an AI tool
- Make use of ideas that an AI tool conveyed to you

you need to cite that material in the text of your essay, just as you would cite any other outside source.

Failure to abide by these rules will be considered a violation of the UNC Honor Code.

Full bibliography

Phil Agre. 1995. Institutional circuitry: thinking about the forms and uses of information. *Information Technology and Libraries* 14(4): 225-230.

Marcia Bates. 1976. Rigorous systematic bibliography. *RQ* 16(1).

Marcia Bates. 1999. The invisible substrate of information science. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 50(12): 1043-1050.

Eric P. S. Baumer and Jed R. Brubaker. 2017. Post-userism. In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '17)*: 6291–6303.

Geoffrey Bowker. 2005. *Memory practices in the sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (pp. 139-184)

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Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page. 1998. Anatomy of a large-scale hypertextual Web search engine. *Computer Networks and ISDN Systems* 30: 107-117.

Michael Buckland. 1991. Information as thing. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42(5): 351-360.

Jenna Burrell. 2016. How the machine ‘thinks’: Understanding opacity in machine learning algorithms. *Big Data & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715622512>

Vannevar Bush. 1945. As we may think. *The Atlantic Monthly*. July 1945, 101-108.

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- Morgan Currie, Britt Paris, Irene Pasquetto, and Jennifer Pierre. 2016. The conundrum of police officer-involved homicides: Counter-data in Los Angeles County. *Big Data & Society*.
- Anil Dash. 2021. NFTs weren't supposed to end like this. *The Atlantic* April 2, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/nfts-werent-supposed-end-like/618488/>
- Renee DiResta. The complexity of simply searching for medical advice. *Wired* July 3, 2018. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/the-complexity-of-simply-searching-for-medical-advice/>
- Paul Dourish. 2006. Implications for design. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '06)*: 541–550.
- Derek J. De Solla Price. 1965. Networks of scientific papers. *Science* 149(3683): 510-515.
- Michel Duchein. 1983. Theoretical principles and practical problems of respect des fonds in archival science. *Archivaria* 16: 64-82.
- Luciana Duranti. 1995. Reliability and authenticity: the concepts and their applications. *Archivaria* 39: 5-10.
- Margaret Egan and Jesse Shera. 1952. Foundations of a theory of bibliography. *Library Quarterly* 22(2): 125-137.
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Ann Light, Irina Shklovski, and Alison Powell. 2017. Design for existential crisis. In *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI EA '17)*: 722–734.

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