School of Information and Library Science  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill  
INLS 881 – Research Issues and Questions

Fall 2023  
Day/Time: Tuesday only, 11:00-1:45pm  
Location: Manning 214  
Credits: 3  
Instructor: Brian Sturm  
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Office Hours: By appointment  
Course Web Site: https://edtech.unc.edu/service/canvas/

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Overview. Investigation of the fundamental ideas in information and library science. Exploration and discussion in seminar format.

The goal of this course is to introduce doctoral students to research and discovery in the ILS field and to prepare them to become productive scholars. Students will encounter the range of research questions and issues that arise in the field of information and library science, with particular emphasis on the research interests of the current SILS faculty and doctoral students. The role of both theory and prior empirical research in generating research questions will be discussed. The variety of methods available to conduct ILS research will be reviewed.

The class members will participate in reading, reviewing, analyzing, and discussing, in some detail, relevant research literature in six particular facets of information and library science:

- Describing and organizing information,
- Curation, management, and preservation of materials,
- Information services and the organizations that provide them,
- Information needs, information seeking, and information sources,
- Information retrieval systems, interactive information retrieval, and human-computer interaction, and
- Information use and sharing, with special emphasis on scholarly communication.

As we explore each of these areas, you will be asked to consider how your own research interests interact with them. Is your research interest fully included in one of these areas? Is it a combination of two or more of the areas? Is it related to one or more of these areas, but also brings in the perspectives of other disciplines? Through our discussion and the assignments, you will have the opportunity to further develop your own interests in relation to the larger field of information and library science.

A second goal of this seminar is to assist the participants in being successful as doctoral students at SILS and as future scholars. This goal will be addressed by providing opportunities for you to develop particular research-related knowledge and skills, particularly in the following areas:

- Literature searching, managing your literature, and writing a literature review,
- Peer reviewing, and receiving and giving feedback,
• Project management,
• Research ethics and working with human subjects/participants,
• Presenting your work in various formats (orally, in a poster, in a paper),
• Collaboration, including interdisciplinary collaboration,
• Proposal writing, and
• Data management.

*Rationale and relationship to the current curriculum.* It is required that students take INLS 881 at or near the beginning of their doctoral studies. The discussions in this seminar will help students identify research questions of particular interest to them and will provide a context within which initial explorations of those questions can be conducted.

**Special Needs:** If you feel that you may need an accommodation for a disability or have any other special need, please make an appointment to discuss this with me and/or register with UNC [Accessibility Resources and Service](https://www.unc.edu/depts/academic/rsa/). I will best be able to address special circumstances if I know about them early in the semester. My office hours and contact information are listed at the beginning of this syllabus.

**Diversity Statement**
"In support of the University’s diversity goals and the mission of the School of Information and Library Science, SILS embraces diversity as an ethical and societal value. We broadly define diversity to include race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, sexual orientation and physical and learning ability. As an academic community committed to preparing our graduates to be leaders in an increasingly multicultural and global society we strive to:

• Ensure inclusive leadership, policies and practices;
• Integrate diversity into the curriculum and research;
• Foster a mutually respectful intellectual environment in which diverse opinions are valued; Recruit traditionally underrepresented groups of students, faculty and staff; and Participate in outreach to underserved groups in the State.

The statement represents a commitment of resources to the development and maintenance of an academic environment that is open, representative, reflective and committed to the concepts of equity and fairness."

~The faculty of the School of Information and Library Science ([https://sils.unc.edu/diversity](https://sils.unc.edu/diversity))

**NOTE ON WRITING IN YOUR OWN WORDS**

It is very important that you both attribute your sources and avoid excessive use of quotes. Be aware of the University of North Carolina’s policy on plagiarism. Your written work must be original. Ask if you have any doubts about what this means. We will also consider the ethical use of generative AI such as ChatGPT (the Center for Faculty Excellence has a [useful overview](https://www.cfe.unc.edu/ethics/)).

All cases of plagiarism (unattributed quotation or paraphrasing) of anyone else's work, whether from someone else's answers to homework or from published materials, will be officially reported and dealt with according to UNC policies ([Instrument of Student Judicial Governance, Section II.B.1. and III.D.2](http://instrument.unc.edu)).
EVALUATION AND ASSIGNMENTS

The assignments for the seminar aim to foster your growth as a scholar and researcher in information and library science, through participation in discussions, reviews of current issues and the relevant literature, and development of research questions and proposals. They include:

Seminar participation and contributions (25%)

You are expected to complete reading assignments prior to the class in which they will be discussed. I will be expecting you to be an active participant in class, remembering that the quality of your comments and questions is as important as the quantity. Other contributions to the seminar are also important, such as sharing interesting articles you have read, things you have learned, or questions to which you do not know the answer. As a researcher, you are expected to express opinions, as well as the reasons and evidence for them.

Seminal works; inspirational works/events (25% combined)

As we read and discuss important topics in information and library science this year, we will have the task of exploring each area’s underlying theories, the methods used, and current work in the area. We’ll increase our exposure to these research areas through your contributions. Each student will be expected to select, read, and report on (a) two seminal works and (b) one inspirational work or event, in the context of a class discussion.

Two seminal works (20%)

A seminal work is one that initiates a new area of research – it might propose a different way of understanding some phenomenon and/or be a ground-breaking empirical study. In all cases, it was work that later scholars built upon fruitfully. For the purposes of this assignment, any article that was published prior to 2000, that has been cited more than 50 times, and that you believe was important to the development of the field is eligible.

Read a seminal article of your choosing, preferably in the area in which you envision conducting your own research. Are there issues or questions from the literature we discussed that built on this work or were informed by it? In what way(s) is this article still important for current research?

Be prepared to give a brief, informal summary of the selected article and your thoughts and ideas about it (5 minutes, no slides necessary). You should report on the seminal work during the section of the course to which it is pertinent. At least one week in advance, email the article citation to the class via CANVAS before the class session in which you will present it, as well as posting the full text in the Files section, “Seminal Works” folder of our CANVAS site. Due one week after your assigned class session: submit a short essay (2-3 pages single spaced, plus references) that discusses literature that has been influenced by your seminal work.

Inspirational works/events (5%)

An inspirational article or event may help you develop or understand a research question, make you think about something you thought you understood in a new way, serve as the basis for a line of research, model a particular research method, drive you to demonstrate that the author/speaker is wrong, or be an example of excellent research.
Select your inspirational work or event (it could be an article, a book chapter, a web site, a lecture, a video, or a conference presentation). As soon as possible after you’ve identified the inspirational work or event, you will share it with us in class. Please do so at least one week in advance of your assigned week.

Please notify me when you’re ready to tell us about this work or event — why you find this work or event inspirational, and how it is helping you or will help you with your work. (Note that I am not asking you to summarize it.) Email the work’s citation or a link to the event’s website to us before the class session in which you will present it, as well as posting the full text (if applicable) to our CANVAS site, “Inspirational Works” folder.

**Evaluation criteria**

This assignment will be evaluated in terms of the selection of the works/event (i.e., it was important for the field and relevant to the topic at hand), the clarity of your summation and analysis, and the originality of your ideas about it.

**Developing your own research interests in relation to specific aspects of the field (50%)**

In each of the reviews just described, you are considering a particular aspect of the field of information and library science, and how your research interests are positioned in relation to that aspect of the field. In other words, you’re taking the broad view and positioning your interests within it. In this assignment, you’ll focus on your own research interests and try to specify them more clearly, still keeping in mind their position within the field. In other words, you’ll take the specific view based on your own interests and discuss them in relation to what you’ve learned about the broader field. As you consider the various things that you’ve learned about these three areas in the first semester, your own interests will likely evolve.

For this assignment, write an analytical literature review focused very specifically on your own research interests. In addition, you will include a brief prospectus for a study that you’d like to conduct as a preliminary look at your research area. The introduction and literature review of the paper should provide a rationale for conducting the study; the prospectus should provide a brief explanation of how the study will be carried out.

**Evaluation criteria**

The final paper should be approximately 8-10 pages, single-spaced, plus references; the prospectus portion should be approximately 1-2 pages.

The criteria used to evaluate your final product will be similar to the criteria routinely applied to research proposals. These include the significance of the question/problem to the field, the adequacy of the citations to previous work, the feasibility, validity and logic of your plans for a study, and the organization, clarity, and style of your presentation.

**August 22 - Course Introduction**

Introductions; Course Overview; Being a doctoral student and beyond (joys and challenges); Topics you’d like to address this semester

**August 29 - Defining Your Place in the Research Landscape**
An introduction to writing Literature Reviews (style, scope, format, etc.)

Readings:


September 5 – Wellness Day – NO CLASS

September 12 - Scope of Library and Information Science

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):


September 19 - Anatomy of a Research Question

Readings:

- Alter, Steven, and Alan R. Dennis. "Selecting Research Topics: Personal Experiences and Speculations for the Future." Communications of the Association for Information Systems 8 (2002). [https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol8/iss1/21/ and on CANVAS] Read the first sections, through the presentation of the framework; skim the two authors’ personal stories as you wish; you can skip section V.
• Wildemuth, Barbara M. *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2017. [Z669.7 .W55 2017 and as eBook via UNC Catalog] Read Chapter 2 (p.11-20) [available in CANVAS along with table of contents] and at least one of the other chapters in Part II of the book. Consider possible sources for research questions in your area of interest.

**September 26 - Work-Life Balance, Health and Wellness**

**Readings:**


**October 3 - Information Retrieval, Information Seeking and User Services**

**Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):**


October 10 - Organizations, Institutions and Social Interactions

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):

  http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822394716

  [Read: Chapter 1]

  https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb4324207. [Read: “Limits to Information” (chapter 1).]

  https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1783522/

  [Read: Chapters 1, 2, 12, browse table of contents]

  [Read: Chapter 1, browse table of contents]


- Kromhout, B. "Containers will not fix your broken culture (and other hard truths)." *ACM Queue* 15, no. 6 (2017): 61, 4, 40-43.
  https://queue.acm.org/detail.cfm?id=3185224.

  https://www.jstor.org/stable/30036529
October 17 - Encountering Information, Teaching and Learning

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):


- Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, Jeremy N. V. Miles. “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults.” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html) [Read: Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 6 (Conclusions).]


October 24 - Research Methods and Theory Development

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):

- Rosenblatt, Louise M. *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978. [Read: Chapters 1 and 2]


October 31 - Classification, Organization and Representation of Information

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):


- Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. [CanVAS] [Read: Introduction, Chapter 9, Chapter 10] [Recommended 3x]

- Buckland, Michael. “What is a ‘document’?” *Journal for the American Society of Information Science* 48, no. 9 (1997): 804–809. [CANVAS] [Read: Chapter 9, Chapter 10] [Recommended 3x]

- Codd, E.F. “A Relational Model of Data for Large Shared Data Banks.” *Communications of the ACM* 13, no. 6 (1970): 377-387. [CANVAS] [Read: Chapters 1 and 2]


Weaver, Warren. “Recent contributions to the mathematical theory of communication.” In *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949. [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c4ee/686f5dd14ac83c4b10a8bce9a62341ea0a3a.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c4ee/686f5dd14ac83c4b10a8bce9a62341ea0a3a.pdf)


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**November 7 - Professions, Field Dynamics, and Science and Technology Studies (STS)**

**Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):**


November 14 - Design to Support Interaction, HCI and CSCW

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):

- Preece, J., Sharp, H., & Rogers, Y. Interaction design: Beyond human-computer interaction. Chichester: John Wiley, 2015. [CANVAS] [Read: Chapter 1]

*First full draft of final paper due on November 14 at 11pm*

November 21 - Keeping Information over Time: Curation, Law, Policy and Ethics

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read):


November 28 - Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing, Data Mining and Analytics, Synthesis and Conclusions

Readings (choose one to read solo and one we’ll all read)

December 5 – Parting Thoughts and Wrapping Up

*Final version of semester paper due: December 7th at 11pm*

Thank you to Barbara Wildemuth, Amelia Gibson, and Cal Lee for sharing materials from earlier iterations of this course.