
INLS 500

Human Information Interactions

Spring 2023
Asynchronous Online Only
January 9, 2023 – April 28, 2023

Instructor:
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Note – use Canvas Mail whenever possible

Office Hours: By appointment

Assignments

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; and the use and dissemination of information.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing this course will:

- be familiar with the empirical and theoretical literature related to information seeking, including the recognition of information needs, actions taken to resolve those needs, the roles of intermediaries (both human and machine), and the retrieval and use of information;
- understand key concepts related to the ways in which information is created, structured, disseminated and used, with particular emphasis on scholarly information behaviors;
- be able to identify the ways in which the context of an information interaction can affect the process and outcomes of that interaction;
- explore the impact of technology on human information interactions; and
- critically apply theories and empirical findings to the definition and solution of problems related to human information interactions, as encountered in the information professions.

Requirements

- 1) Read, think, discuss, listen, research and write. You are expected to read/view the assigned material during the assigned week. This is a fairly reading-intensive course, so please schedule accordingly.
- 2) Be prepared to post and react to posts on Canvas each week.
- 3) All work should be completed on time. I do realize that sometimes circumstances beyond your control make it impossible for you to turn in an assignment on time. Please contact me to discuss your situation. Unless you are given a rare extension, your grade for that assignment will be lowered by 5% per day the assignment is late.

Materials

Readings will be placed in the Canvas site or be available through links. Videos will have online links.

Evaluation

Your assignments for this course are:

- **Information Environment Evaluations (30%)**
- **Usability Testing (20%)**
- **Information Seeking Diary (30%)**
- **Reflections Paper (20%)**

Methods of Assessment & Grading

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Communication is a key part of education. The best way for you to ask me questions about your assignments is to post in the class forum on Canvas. You may also email me to ask questions and also to inform me of conflicts or other situations. Normally you should expect a response within 24 hours. Discussion of grades and other issues will be done by appointment on Zoom or by telephone.

Don't wait to tell me of any potential issues or conflicts! Early communication is key!

ASSIGNMENTS

#1 – INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT EVALUATIONS (30%) ONGOING

We will be using what we learn in class each week to evaluate different information environments, including web sites, applications, and real-world locations. Each module in canvas will include a prompt and questions that can be used to discuss the environment, but it is perfectly fine to discuss another angle if you wish. You will post your observations to your small group discussion forum by the due date shown. You will then have 7 days to react to your group mates' posts and discuss the topic in more detail.

Note that your suggestions for information environments to evaluate are welcome! See the group forum where you can post your suggestions or comment on other suggestions.

Your initial posts should be thoughtful, but need not take an inordinate amount of time. Plan for 10-15 minutes to write them. Grading for these posts will be based on your initial post (0-3 points) and your reactions (0-2 points). The final grade for this assignment will be a sum of your weekly grades normalized to a 100 point scale.

#2 – USABILITY TESTING (20%) DUE FEBRUARY 19th

For this assignment you will work with your small group members. Each group member will observe one other group member either in person or using streaming video while they perform one of the tasks listed below. Note that every student must spend time both observing and being observed for this assignment. In groups with an odd number of members, this will mean that group members will not simply pair off. Students must select different tasks for each part of the assignment – ie you will not be observed doing the same task you observe another student doing.

For the task, the student being observed will use the instructions to interact with the web site listed. They will use Think Aloud to express their thoughts during this process. The student observing will take notes and make any observations during this process. This part of the assignment should take 10-15 minutes.

The observing student will then write up their notes and post them to the group forum. This should be a mixture of raw notes and analysis of the results. Use the usability testing information from class to inform these notes. The student who was observed can respond with their own thoughts to this posting. All other students will have one week to respond to each posting with their own thoughts and connections to their own observations. The notes plus analysis should be roughly 1000 words.

Select one of the scenarios listed below:

1. Amazon Web Site – Find a wedding gift for a cousin you knew well growing up but have drifted apart from. All you really know about them now is that they like anything to do with the Iron Chefs. You need to find a gift you can get within three days so you can take it with you, and it needs to cost between \$30 and \$50.
2. EBay – you have a Disney pin that looks like a bunch of animated movie stills and want to find out if you could possibly sell it on EBay. Find a comparable item so you can determine how much it's worth.
3. WebMD – you woke up this morning and your thumb is hurting to move. Find out what it might be and whether you need to go to the doctor or if there's a treatment you can do at home. Your symptoms include a sharp pain when you move it the wrong way all along the inside of your thumb.
4. Zillow – you want to buy a house in the Chapel Hill/Durham area but have a limited budget of 150k. The house needs to have 3 bedrooms and a fenced in yard for your dog. You have 2 children and want to be sure that the school district is good as well. Other items on your list include a fireplace, a stand in shower, a great room, one level, wooded lot, garage, and dishwasher – you want as many of those as you can get.
5. Southwest – you have 2 free tickets from agreeing to take a later flight the last time you traveled. You want to use them to go somewhere fun for spring break but also want to get the most bang for your buck with them. Find a US destination that is considered a vacation spot where the normal price of the ticket is above \$400 from RDU.

#3 – INFORMATION SEEKING DIARY (30%) DUE MARCH 10 (with an extension to March 19)

[Based on an assignment prepared by Dr. Verna Pungitore, SLIS, Indiana University, with modifications by Dr. Deborah Barreau and Barbara Wildemuth]

You will keep a short diary or journal over a period of hours or days that covers an information-seeking experience with an identifiable beginning and end. It does not have to be a unique event and it may or may not have been resolved. You will write up what you thought, felt, and did, and how you understand the experience based upon our readings and discussions in class. The two deliverables for this assignment are (1) the diary itself, and (2) your analysis of the event described in the diary. Both deliverables are due by midnight on March 10, although I will extend the deadline to March 19th for those that want extra time.

This assignment requires you to note your thoughts over time! Do not wait until the last minute! **Also, do not use an information need based upon a class you are taking – this should be something else.**

The Diary/Journal

Start by describing your information need. You should choose a current information need. In most cases your problem should be more complex than finding a fact.

Example: My home computer died suddenly, and I needed to buy a new computer as soon as possible. I did some preliminary shopping (both online and in a Best Buy store) and also consulted with IT support. Through an iterative process, in which additional focus was gained with each iteration, I eventually settled on a particular computer and the other peripherals I would need to accompany it. This process occurred over several weeks.

Take notes or record your experience in some way. The diary does not need to be neat and orderly. It's more important that you record what's happening and what you're thinking/feeling as it's happening than that you present it neatly. It only needs to be neat enough so that you can interpret and remember what happened for your later analysis of the event.

- How did you know when you needed to look for information?
- What steps did you take and what motivated you along the way?
- Did you make any incidental discoveries that influenced your behavior?
- When and why did you finally stop looking (or are you still looking)?
- How did your emotions affect the search process?

While the diary is a necessary deliverable for this assignment, it will play only a minor role in the grading. I will refer to it, as needed, to understand and evaluate your analysis of the event.

The Analysis

Assess which (if any) of the information seeking and use models we have discussed in class apply to your situation – if any. Write a brief report (3-4 double-spaced pages) that interprets the experience. Concentrate on analyzing what happened instead of recounting each step. For example, it is more important to hear your reactions to what you did than to hear what you did - how important was the information to you? What sources were consulted? What barriers or surprises did you experience? If you consulted systems or online sources, describe the interaction and why it worked, or did not. If you consulted other people, describe the interaction and how you were able to convey your need to this person. Why do you think your experience was a successful (or unsuccessful) one? What did you learn that you did not know beforehand? What would you do differently if a similar problem arises in the future? Be sure to relate your observations to readings and discussions from class. Cite them as appropriate.

Evaluation Criteria

Grades will be based upon the quality and depth of your analysis of the experience. A description of the need and what motivated it, any obstacles you experienced, sources used, tasks performed, and results obtained along with your evaluation of those results should be included in the paper. While this paper is relatively informal in style, it should be formatted using a standard publication style (APA Style) and should include citations to the literature as appropriate.

Analyze more than you describe. Connect to class topics!

#4 FINAL REFLECTIONS PAPERS (20%) DUE APRIL 28 by midnight

Instead of a final exam, each student will write an informal paper to sum up their entire class experience. Papers should be 4-6 pages long, double spaced, and use your class notes as well as class assignments, class readings, and group discussions. The final reflection papers are a summary of your experience in the class, but also serve as your thoughts on the topics presented throughout the semester. Your paper should tie it all together into a distinct narrative. Note that this should not be a simple recap of each week's topic or theme presented in chronological order – do not write this paper saying things like “The next week we studied this topic...” Instead, find a way to organize the information into a whole that is meaningful for you. This organization could be relating class topics to your area of interest, to a job, or to your experience. It could be reorganizing them based upon a different perspective. It could be discussing ideas you found very interesting or connected to personally. Not all topics covered in the course need to be discussed, but it is expected that most of them will be mentioned. Remember that you are writing about the topics in a way that means something to you – be thoughtful about how you organize them! Relating the topics to your own interests is encouraged. Remember that you can discuss the assignments and group discussions as well.

Grading Scale

The grading system for graduate students at UNC makes grades much less important than before. Getting a P means that you have done what I asked for in the assignment. Most students should expect to get a P for their work in this class.

Grading is as follows for graduate students:

H (94-100) – clearly surpassed requirements

P (80-93) – fully met requirements

L (70-79) – barely met requirements, need more work F (69 and below) - failing

There will be no extra credit work for this course.

Grades for undergraduates are based on UNC Registrar policy:

A = 94-100 points	B = 83-86 points	C = 73-76 points	D = 63-66 points
A- = 90-93 points	B- = 80-82 points	C- = 70-72 points	D- = 60-62 points
B+ = 87-89 points	C+ = 77-79 points	D+ = 67-69points	F = 0-59 points

University Honor System

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has had a student-administered honor system and judicial system for over 100 years. Because academic honesty and the development and nurturing of trust and trustworthiness are important to all of us as individuals, and are encouraged and promoted by the honor system, this is a most significant University tradition. More information is available at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/honor/honor.html> . The system is the responsibility of students and is regulated and governed by them, but faculty share the responsibility and readily commit to its ideals. If students in this class have questions about their responsibility under the honor code, please bring them to me or consult with the Office of the Dean of Students. The web site identified above contains all policies and procedures pertaining to the student honor system. I encourage your full participation and observance of this important aspect of the University.

SILS 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, Dr. Barbara B. Moran.

Students with Disabilities

"The Department of Disability Services (DDS), a part of the Division of Student Affairs, works with departments throughout the University to assure that the programs and facilities of the University are accessible to every student in the University community. Additionally, DDS provides reasonable accommodations so students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified may, as independently as possible, meet the demands of University life." Visit their website at <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/> for more information.