INLS 737 | Information Services in a Diverse Society

Dr. Maggie Melo

Instructor: Marijel (Maggie) Melo, Ph.D. | Email: melo@ad.unc.edu | Zoom: https://unc.zoom.us/j/2720833877
Tuesdays, 11:00-1:45pm | Office Hours: By appointment. | Course Canvas: https://uncch.instructure.com/courses/52239

COURSE OVERVIEW

The purpose of this course is to prepare students to work as Information and Library Science (ILS) professionals in today’s increasingly diverse society. Students will develop a theoretical base in critical race theory (CRT) and other cross-disciplinary theories and conceptual frameworks, while they explore issues relevant to working as a LIS professional with populations that have historically experienced challenges and marginalization in the United States. In particular, the course will consider how issues related to class, race, gender, culture, language, and sexuality operate in and exert an influence on the provision of information services. It is expected that at the conclusion of this course, you have a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the intersectionality of sociocultural factors to use to both analyze and conduct research and to develop programs and services, involving issues of social justice, equity, identity, and diversity in LIS.

PREREQUISITES FOR THIS COURSE (Adapted from Fleming, Crystal M.)

1. Critical thinking – the ability to challenge what you think may be common sense; to ask questions and seek empirical evidence
2. Reflexivity – the ability to look at your own experiences, beliefs, and behaviors
3. Compassion – for others and for yourself
4. Willingness to experience and sit with discomfort

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course seeks:

- To introduce students to the societal issues facing communities engaged with LIS institutions, and challenge or problematize conceptions of what it means to be neutral or value-free from multiple perspectives: societal, professional, and personal.
- To introduce students to the concepts of diversity, cultural competency, power, privilege, and intersectionality and to identify ways in which each presents opportunities and challenges for the different information professions and the communities they serve.
- To familiarize students with the theory and implementation of Critical Race Theory and its offshoots as it relates to information services and community building.
To provide students with the opportunity to identify, address, and reflect upon the information needs and practices of underserved and marginalized groups in the United States, as well as the power inequities involved in information work.

To examine critically the role of professional activism and social justice within different information fields.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Book:


Additional Materials:

- Other reading materials will be made available in the “Files” section in Canvas or are hyperlinked in the syllabus.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignment 1: Critical Reflections (20%)

Working effectively with diverse communities, demands critical reflection on one’s own position and the complex interactions between different aspects of identity. As Nicole Cooke (2016) explains, critical self-reflection leads to a readiness to engage with cultural competence. By critically examining our own value system we situate ourselves regarding our own intersectionality, privilege, and marginality. “Only then can the circumstances of others be understood and fully appreciated.”

This assignment has two components, each submitted at different points in the course. In the first component you will write a positionality paper. In the second component, you will write a post-class reflection.

**Positionality Statement**: (January 30th before the start of class in Canvas “Assignments”) (10%)

This short paper (2 pages single-spaced) asks you to understand your own relationship to the topic of this course. The purpose of this assignment is to heighten your awareness of your positionality as a step in better understanding members of your organization and community who come from different backgrounds. One of the assumptions underlying this assignment is that things don’t simply happen to us, we are active in interpreting and assigning meaning to experiences in our lives. These experiences in turn influence the way we see the world and what we value. Students will not be required to share their statements with the class. In the past, however, several students wanted to share their statements with the class by either reading their statements aloud or by posting their statements on Canvas. Again, not required.

In this paper, please answer this question: What are your experiences with the topics to be covered in this course? Think about (1) your own personal history with issues related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, and/or ability or disability in your past; and 2) how these experiences impact the current journey you are on.

**Post-class Critical Reflection**: (Due April 30th before the start of class in Canvas “Assignments”) (10%)
For this assignment, you will be asked to write a short (2 pages single-spaced) statement in which you reflect on the course—essentially you will be writing a post-script to the positionality statement that you submitted earlier in the semester. As noted above, one of the assumptions underlying this assignment is that things don’t simply happen to us, we are active in interpreting and assigning meaning to experiences in our lives. These experiences—including this course—influence the way we see the world and what we value. We have discussed and explored many issues this semester. I would like you to now take time to reflect, as Nicole Cooke does in the final chapter of *Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals*, on what you have learned (both about yourself and about theory/practice) and how it has changed your perceptions of working with/for diverse, often marginalized, communities as an ILS professional.

**Assignment 2: SILS Scholar Showcase – Project Fair (40%)**

Discussing diversity issues in academic isolation will become an echo chamber if you don’t have a place to actively apply your learning. For that reason, students will present research and attend research presentations for the annual Project Fair during the SILS Scholar Showcase.

Each student in INLS 737 will be expected to make a scholarly contribution to this event, in the form of a data physicalization project that focuses on a topic covered in this course. Students could work individually or in pairs to develop the deliverables for this assignment (listed in a subsequent section). Members of the SILS community, including faculty, current students, and alumni, will be invited to attend the symposium.

**Content:** The SILS Scholar Showcase will be comprised of class exhibitions on April 30. Our class will be exhibiting our data physicalization artifacts.

Each artifact will...

1. Address a specific, population that has historically experienced challenges and marginalization in the United States or a current social justice issue that you believe libraries should respond to
2. Outline relevant inequities and social justice issues
3. Identify the impacted communities involved
4. Outline possible courses of action
5. Suggest implications of courses of action

To view INLS 737 data physicalization project examples: [https://eitm.unc.edu/resources/#data-physicalization](https://eitm.unc.edu/resources/#data-physicalization)

**Deliverables:**

1. Proposals: Proposals should be related to the general topic of Information for Social Good and should address social justice issues related to information and library science broadly. Proposals should focus on a population that has historically experienced challenges and marginalization in the United States or a current social justice issue that you believe libraries should respond to.
   - Format: Proposals should take the form of a presentation abstract (~300 words) describing the issues to be addressed by the data physicalization artifact. Submissions should include the following metadata:
• Full names (pen names are welcome), email addresses, for each group member.
• Title of the presentation.
• Full abstract for the presentation (~300 words).
• Short abstract (50-100 words) for the SILS Scholar Showcase website.

Each group must submit a copy of the proposal document by the due date, March 5.

2. Preliminary research: Students will submit a research outline that details the sources they will use to develop their data physicalizations. While this outline does not have to be polished, it should be well-organized into topic areas, or headings that are indicative of the conceptual organization of your presentation. This should include a 10-15 item bibliography and should cover the content areas described in “Content” above. Research outlines are due on March 19.

3. Project-Fair-specific deliverables: (1) Students will then create a data physicalization artifact with media of their choosing. (2) They will document their process (including images and video) and speak to the artifact as it’s situated in theory, action, and reflection through a strategic rationale documented on Adobe Express.

4. SILS Scholar Showcase – Project Fair Participation (April 26; time is TBA). Students are encouraged to participate and attend the other showcase events.

Assignment 4: Class Participation (40%)

Items that will contribute to your class participation grade include:

1. Completion of readings prior to coming to class.

2. Weekly reading reflection: You’ll be asked to respond to the week’s readings (or one reading of your choice) by sharing your TQEs: thoughts, questions, and epiphanies. Reflections are expected to be ~200 words total. Your responses can be written in bullet points. Please post your reflections in Canvas “Discussions” by Monday, 7:00pm.

3. Discussion facilitation (prompt is available in Sakai “Assignments”): Throughout the semester, students will lead one class discussion based on the assigned readings/topic for the week. I don’t expect facilitators to cover all readings but encourage them to focus on one or two. Although not mandatory by any means, I also encourage facilitators to suggest readings and/or other material for us to focus on for the week (I’ll switch them out with existing readings). I’ll meet with students a week prior to their facilitation date to offer feedback, to provide any necessary materials for activities, and to offer any strategies and ideas. There will be 1-3 student(s) for each discussion facilitation.

4. Weekly “Hot Topics”: Current events will be placed in conversation with course topics. Hot topics also pertain to the mundane and the everyday (i.e., the topic doesn’t have to be something that went viral on Twitter, but could be an observation a student makes when shopping online for groceries, walking to their mailbox, etc.) CRT has a commitment to praxis and making theory applicable to the real world and
communities, so this is a chance to apply CRT lenses to an analysis of current events. At the beginning of each class, we will generate a list of topics with an accompanying question.

5. *In Class Participation:* This seminar is a discussion-based course. Students are expected to complete all readings, to think through the issues raised in the readings, and to articulate thoughts on the materials in class. Clearly, you need to attend class to participate in the discussions.

**GRADING AND DUE DATES**

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<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Reflections</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Positionality: January 30</td>
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<td>Reflection: April 30</td>
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<td>SLS Scholar Showcase – Project Fair</td>
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<td>Will take place on April 26</td>
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<td>Course Participation</td>
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<td>Weekly Sakai forum responses</td>
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<td>Weekly ‘hot topics’ contributions</td>
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<td>Class discussion facilitation</td>
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Based on UNC Registrar policy for graduate-level courses:

- **H** (95-100) “clear excellence” above and beyond what is required (Note: if you’re interested in earning an “H” in this course, please let me know. This will require additional projects beyond what’s outlined in the syllabus)
- **P** (80-94) all requirements satisfied at entirely acceptable level
- **L** (70-79) low pass; substandard performance in significant ways
- **F** (<70) failed; performance that is seriously deficient and unworthy of graduate credit

***Undergraduate grading scale: 95-100 (A), 90-94 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-86 (B), 80-82 (B-), 70-79 (C, same +/- ranges as above), 60-69 (D, same +/- ranges as above), 60-69 (D, same +/- ranges as above), <60 (F)

**CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

Our overarching goal is to build a professional community in which an exchange of ideas and opinions is respected and welcome. Discussions should be professionally conducted and should be based on course readings and critical thinking. Because the course is founded on a critical sociocultural framework, the material will include diverse perspectives, not necessarily aligning with traditional or dominant views. The purpose is to expand the parameters of your thinking. Additionally, issues related to diversity and social justice may involve strongly held beliefs and may include current political and social controversies. At times, the discussion might be uncomfortable. Remember – your classmates (and the instructor) may have different perspectives on issues than you, but they still deserve your respect.

**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.

**ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES**

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 Website for contact information: [https://ars.unc.edu](https://ars.unc.edu) or email ars@unc.edu.
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

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 their website: https://caps.unc.edu/ or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

TITLE IX RESOURCES

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance, Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

BASIC NEEDS SECURITY

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Also, please me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

SILS has a food pantry located in the graduate student lounge and a Free Little Library (books, puzzles, zines, and often craft materials) by Manning 30.

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. We encourage your full participation and observance of this important aspect of the University.

GENERATIVE AI USAGE: https://provost.unc.edu/student-generative-ai-usage-guidance/

Note: Many thanks to Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell for her guidance and for sharing her course resources. Moreover, the work of the following scholars, as well as their syllabi and reading lists, influenced the development and revision of this course: Dr. Nicole Cooke, Dr. Adrienne Keene, Dr. Safiya Noble, and Dr. Dana Thompson Dorsey.