INFO 380C: INFORMATION IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Professor William Aspray
Fall 2011

This is a syllabus for both of my sections:

Unique number 28440, M 9 am – noon, UTA 1.208
Unique number 28445, Tu 6 – 9 pm, UTA 1.208

Office: UTA 5.432, catch me before or after class, or email for an appointment to bill@ischool.utexas.edu. Office phone: 512 471 3877.
Teaching assistant: TBD

Catalog description:
Examines the role of information in human activities, particularly how it shapes and is shaped by the social and cultural context. Considers how individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and society at large create, find, use, understand, share, transform, and curate information.

Introduction:
This is a new course, required as part of the new masters curriculum. My feeling is that there is no essential piece of information or theory that every one of our students must know, but it is important that our students have a general understanding of the ways in which information scholars study information and information technologies in social and cultural context. Of the many different themes I could emphasize in the assigned readings, I selected five:

- Theory
- Traditional Library, Archival, and Museum Studies
- Digital Divide/Information Around the World
- Privacy, Ethics, and Policy
- Information Work and Workers

If the course were organized to have all the readings grouped together on any one of these topics, we would have had approximately two to three weeks of reading for each bullet listing above. Instead, I have spread these readings out over the entire semester. So in any given week you are likely to have one or at most two papers about any given topic; and most weeks we will have readings that address at least four of those bulleted themes. Individual students who have a particular interest in one of these topics will have an opportunity for further study of the topic through several of the course assignments.
Weekly readings and questions:

Except for the first and second weeks of the semester, there will be required readings each week. The required readings will be posted on BlackBoard, so there are no books to buy or papers to acquire for the class. Each week, you are expected to read the material carefully, send two questions to me by email (bill@ischool.utexas.edu) - one question from each of any two of the assigned readings - no later than three hours before the start of class. The questions should be ones that will stimulate thoughtful class discussion. Be prepared to discuss all the papers in class. Courteous, thoughtful, active participation in the class discussion is expected. The weekly required readings are listed later in this document.

Class presentation:

Later in this document you will find a list of books on the social and cultural study of information, broadly conceived. It is not a complete list, but it represents a wide range of topics and approaches. Each student in class will select one book from this list and make a polished, 15-minute, in-class presentation of the major findings and be prepared to answer questions/lead class discussion for an additional 5 minutes. You may not select a book already selected by another student, so you should have several options in mind. I will set up a lottery to decide the order in which students get to select their book.

Essay review:

Using this same book list, you will choose five books and write an essay review about them. You should make your selection so that there is a common topic or theme or method across the five books. The book that you presented about in class may not be included in the five books, but any other book on the list may. (Thus, several students may end up selecting some of the same books for their essay review.) Unless you tell me privately that you do not want your essay review shared with the other students, I will post it on BlackBoard as a resource for the other students. You should not confer with your fellow students about the selection of books; one of the things I will be interested to see is how you develop a theme that connects your five books to one another. The maximum length for your review is 1250 words.

Minute madness:

Later in this document you will also find a list of journal articles that are not part of the assigned weekly readings. You will select one article from the list (again there will be lottery to determine your selection order), and you will present a no-more-than 120 second discussion of the paper, followed by 60 seconds of quick Q&A on Minute Madness Day (November 7/8).
Take-home essay:

Finally, you will be required to write an answer to a take-home essay question, which will be due on December 2 at 5 PM. You will have no less than one week to answer the question, and your answer may not exceed 750 words. You may consult your notes, any of the assigned readings, or any publication on the list of books or additional articles. You may not do a web search, library search, or discuss this assignment with anyone else, including but not limited to the students in either section of the course.

Behavior:

You are expected to meet the customary guidelines for ethical and professional behavior in this course.

Grading:

Grades will be determined as follows:

Weekly questions 15% (quality as well as turning them in on time matters)
Class participation 20%
Class Presentation 15%
Essay Review 25%
Minute Madness 10%
Take-home Essay 15%

Assigned reading:

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<th>Aug 29/30</th>
<th>First class meeting – no assigned reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 5/6</td>
<td>The Monday class does not meet this week (university holiday). For the Tuesday class, there will be no assigned reading. We will have a special event that Tuesday evening. The Tuesday students are required to attend, the Monday students are welcome but not required to attend.</td>
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<td>Langdon Winner, “Mythinformation,” The Whale and the Reactor</td>
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<td>Scott D.N. Cook, &quot;The Structure of Technological</td>
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• Janet Vertesi, Mind the Gap: The London Underground Map and Users' Representations of Urban Space; Social Studies of Science, Feb 01, 2008; 38: 7-33.  
• Genevieve Bell, The Age of the Thumb: A Cultural Reading of Mobile Technologies from Asia, *Knowledge, Technology, and Policy* 19, 2, pp. 41-47  
• Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, Institutional |

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**Book List for Class Presentation and Essay Review:**

17. J. Bastian and B. Alexander, *Communities and Their Archives* (Facet, 2009)
27. C. Borgman, *Scholarship in the Digital Age* (MIT, 2007)
49. R. Coyne, *The Tuning of Place: Sociable Spaces and Pervasive Digital Media* (MIT, 2010)
60. J. English-Lueck, *Cultures@Silicon Valley*. Palo Alto: (Stanford, 2002)
62. C. Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940* (California 1992)
69. David Hakken, *Cyborgs@Cyberspace? An Ethnographer Looks to the Future*, (Routledge, 1999)
74. C. Hess and E. Ostrom, *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice* (MIT, 2006)
82. H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (NYU, revised 2008)
84. R. Jimerson, *Archives Power* (ALA, 2009)
89. B. Laurel, *Computers as Theater* (Addison Wesley 2003)
113. H. Nissenbaum and M. Price, eds. *Academy and the Internet* (Peter Lang, 2004)
121. M. Proctor, C. Cook, and M.G. Williams, eds. *Political Pressure and the Archival Record* (SAA, 2005)
137. P. Thompson, R. Parker and P. Boreham, New Technology @ Work (Routledge, 2008)
139. Sherry Turkle, Simulation and its Discontents (MIT, 2009)
141. J. van den Hoven and J. Weckert, eds. Information Technology and Moral Philosophy (Cambridge, 2009)
142. Jose van Dijck, Mediated Memories in the Digital Age (Stanford, 2007)
147. Webster, Frank, Theories of the Information Society (Taylor & Francis, 2nd ed. 2002)
148. E. Wenger, Communities of Practice (Cambridge, 1999)
152. A. Wright, Glut: Mastering Information Through the Ages (Cornell, 2008)
155. J. Yates, Structuring the Information Age: Life Insurance and Technology in the Twentieth Century (Johns Hopkins 2005)
156. JoAnne Yates and John Van Maanen, eds., Information Technology and Organizational Transformation (Sage, 2000)
158. M. Zeegers and D. Barron, Gatekeepers of Knowledge: A Consideration of the Library, the Book and the Scholar in the Western World (Chandos 2010)
Lisa Zunshine, ed. *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Johns Hopkins, 2010)

Articles for Minute Madness:


59. Two special issues of Archival Science on archives and power. The intro can be found at http://www.mendeley.com/research/archives-records-and-power-the-making-of-modern-memory/
62. Golub, Alex 2004 “Copyright and Taboo.” Anthropological Quarterly 77 (3).
82. Moor, J. H., “Why we need better ethics for emerging technologies,” Ethics and


http://www.igda.org/articles/rreynolds_ethics.php


91. Hope Olson’s work on the social ramifications of information organization as Library Trends, 56 (2): 509-41. 2007.


94. Fischer, C. C. A Value-Added Role for Reviewers in Enhancing the Quality of Published Research. Journal of Scholarly Publishing v. 42 no. 2 (January 2011) p. 226-3

Revised 24 June 2011