SI/UC 110: Introduction to Information Studies

Winter 2014
Prof. Jeff MacKie-Mason
Monday and Wednesday 1-2.30, Angell Auditorium B

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Discussion section schedules

The main lecture (Section 001) meets Monday and Wednesday 1:00 PM-2:30 PM in Angell Auditorium B. We will start at ten minutes past ("Michigan time"); don't be late.

Individual discussion sections are held in North Quad, located at the corner of State and Huron.
Rooms are in the building on the north side of the quad.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section #</th>
<th>GSI</th>
<th>Day &amp; Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Monday 4:00 PM-5:00 PM</td>
<td>2185 NQ</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dustin</td>
<td>Tuesday 4:00 PM-5:00 PM</td>
<td>2245 NQ</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Wednesday 9:00 AM-10:00 AM</td>
<td>2185 NQ</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Wednesday 10:00 AM-11:00 AM</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Wednesday 4:00 PM-5:00 PM</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Dustin</td>
<td>Thursday 4:00 PM-5:00PM</td>
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<td>Padma</td>
<td>Friday 1:00 PM-2:00 PM</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Padma</td>
<td>Friday 2:00 PM-3:00 PM</td>
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Course vision & objectives

One of the most profound transformations in our lifetimes has been the Information Revolution. Never before have so many had access to so much information, or the ability to create, share, and transform it. Never before have we been as connected to others across the globe, or as able to communicate. The information revolution is more than Facebook and cat videos. It is the foundation for an economic and social transformation on a scale comparable to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.

The Information Revolution creates great opportunities for good -- social and individual, public and commercial – and great opportunities for harm, from privacy invasions to fraud to cyberbullying to terrorism. In this class we will learn lessons from earlier social transformations and use those lessons to chart a path toward intellectual and practical mastery of the emerging world of information. Issues will range from the theoretical (what is information?), to the cultural (is life on the net a qualitatively different phenomenon from experiences with earlier distance-shrinking and knowledge-building technologies such as telephones?), to the technical (what are the basic architectures of computing and networks?).

Successful completion of this "gateway" course will give you the conceptual tools for an initial understanding of the politics, economics, and culture of the Information Age, providing a foundation for later study in Information or any number of other disciplines. You will be more thoughtful about thorny information issues, and more “information literate” than you were before.

The teaching team

**Prof. Jeff MacKie-Mason**
Jeff is the Dean of the School of Information, and was one of its founding faculty in 1996. He is an economist and computer scientist who has published research on Internet economics, user-contributed content, spam, auctions, and security among other things. See [http://jeff-mason.com](http://jeff-mason.com) for more information.

[jem@umich.edu](mailto:jmm@umich.edu), @jmmason (Twitter)
Office hours: Fridays 1:30-3:30 NQ 4322
Head GSI: Chris Leeder
Chris is a PhD student in the School of Information. His research is in information literacy and online credibility evaluation. This is Chris’s fourth time with this course, and he is also the lead GSI for the team.

Chris Leeder, cleeder@umich.edu
Office hours: By appointment

Padma Chirumamilla
Padma is a PhD student in the School of Information. Her research is in information and communication technologies for development (ICTD), science and technology studies, and critical theory.

Padma Chirumamilla, padmachi@umich.edu
Office hours: Thursday 10:00 AM-12:00 PM, 4352 NQ

Dustin Hodge
Dustin is a Masters student in both the School of Information and the School of Urban Planning. He has worked at Microsoft in the past. He is a huge nerd.

Dustin Hodge, dustinlh@umich.edu, @Zelbinian (Twitter)
Office hours: Tuesday 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM @ Biggby Coffee, 539 E. Liberty

Sarah Mainville
Sarah is a second year Masters student in the School of Information specializing in library & information science and the preservation of information. She is interested in the role of public libraries as spaces for civic engagement, lifelong learning and community activism.

Sarah Mainville, mainvils@umich.edu, @mainvils (Twitter)
Office hours: Monday 11:00 AM -1:00 PM, 4352 NQ

Charles Senteio
Charles is a PhD student in the School of Information. His research and professional interests are focused on improving health outcomes for chronic disease patients.

Charles Senteio, csenteio@umich.edu, CharlesSenteio (Twitter)
Office hours: Wednesday 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM, 4352 NQ
Communicating with us

Course-related questions

We strongly encourage you to ask us questions, make suggestions, raise concerns. Email sometimes works, but sometimes is not the best way: we receive an insane amount of email every day, and is some communications are better shared more widely. Please follow these guidelines:

1. Most questions, unless you are concerned about privacy or you are sure that the answer only applies to you, should be posted to the discussion forums in CTools. We will be monitoring these, and usually can guarantee a reply within 48 hours. And others will get to see the question and answer too.

2. If you feel it is important to ask a question privately, send us email. We will try to reply within 48 hours, but depending on travel and other deadlines we’re facing, that’s harder to guarantee (the CTools forum works better because all of us can monitor it). If we think the answer would be helpful to others, we may repost your question (anonymously) to the CTools forum for you, along with our answer.

3. MAKE SURE the subject line of any email starts with "SI 110:" so we spot it (and don’t forward it to our spam folders).

4. In emails to us (not public posting!), include your student ID number. This makes everything easier and faster, especially if we need to do something administrative with your request.

5. Be CLEAR, and be brief.

6. And, most important: plan in advance! If you're having trouble with something, email us before it hits the crisis/deadline stage.

Other communications

We have a Facebook group for class discussions, posting interesting news items or examples you find, and kicking around stories. The group is titled “SI110 W14.” It is a closed group, only members can see postings. Participation is optional, but we encourage students to post interesting items.

From time to time I (the professor) will hold “virtual office hours” in the CTools chatroom to collectively answer questions and discuss class issues.
Comportment

Class comportment

The golden rule is “be cool”: respect your fellow classmates, no ifs, ands or buts. You may think your life will be more fulfilling, or your career more remunerative if you use class time to hone your awesome MMO skills or surf porn. But this is a community, and you are hurting others by distracting them from learning. In short, it's rude, and "be cool" means "don't be rude".

Laptops and devices are fine for the lecture — the slides will be available in LectureTools. We will also use LectureTools and CTools in class for interaction (Q&A, polls, ungraded quizzes). Tech support tells us that the most reliable browser for LectureTools is Google Chrome, and that Firefox is the worst choice.

We have three scheduled graded quizzes in class: for these a laptop or tablet that supports CTools is mandatory. If you do not have one you must let your GSI know one week in advance so we can arrange for a loaner or alternative solution.

Turn your phones to vibrate. On your laptops, don't be playing games or tapping away in Facebook: you're not invisible! Reading newspapers, being late, sleeping, etc. are all things I can see, and if I can see them then your classmates can see and you are distracting them. Maybe you should be paying their tuition for them!

If you are rude, I'll feel free to call you out and subject you to general ridicule. I may even do my Jar Jar imitation – and you don’t want that.

On the other hand, do ask questions during class! Or to tell me to slow down, or clarify a point.

Discussion section comportment

Come on time and be prepared! It's rude (not cool) if you are late, and it's a drag for the instructors and other students if you try to get through the class through conniving and shamming that you read the readings. Speak up! You and your classmates get more out of the section by hearing many perspectives.

Laptops (and cell phones and tablets etc.) ARE NOT PERMITTED for discussion sections. (It's about discussion.)

Addressing the teaching team

For Professor MacKie-Mason, you can use the following: "Professor MacKie-Mason" or "Dean MacKie-Mason", or if you're feeling like you've got brass ones, "Jeff" is fine. The GSIs will let you know in discussion sections how you can address them. Let us know how you would prefer to be addressed, and we'll comply.

Grading

This class will have a series of "quests" that you can accomplish to learn the material and
demonstrate your mastery of topics we’ve explored together. There are many ways to understand the world, and to communicate about it: you will have some choice on how to demonstrate your expertise, by selecting from a variety of quests. This is life, people: there is no single path. Also, as in life, you will be responsible for your own success: how many quests you do and how well you do on them is up to you. With responsibility comes control: you know what you need for a given grade, and it’s up to you to earn it.

Grading is a bit different from the usual: for each quest you complete on your learning journey, you will receive experience points (XP). Your grade will be based on the total XP you accumulate during the course.

Some quests include traditional papers and exams, but also more unusual assignments like creating infographics, participating in and evaluating social media, attending talks, etc.

Some quests have choices; some are the same for everyone. But in all cases you get to decide which quests to do (if you don’t do one, you don’t earn any XP). Want to get the most learning out of this class? Do quests. Want to get a good grade…?

Late quests

You still gain experience from quests you perform late, but you haven’t gained as much mastery. (For example, you haven’t mastered getting your assignments in on time, a crucial skill in life!) We will deduct 10% of your XP for each day late you complete a quest.

Point conversion

There are 250,000 total points, plus some extra credit. (This means it’s possible to get a higher-than-perfect score: the near-mythical A+.) There’s no curve; the point count is everything, so you can take full responsibility for your own grade. Here’s how the letter/point conversion works:

- **GRADE**    **POINTS**
- A+ : 250,000+
- A (4.0) : 237,500 - 250,000
- A- (3.7) : 227,500 - 237,250
- B+ (3.3) : 217,500 - 227,250
- B (3.0) : 207,500 - 217,250
- B- (2.7) : 200,000 - 207,250
- C+ (2.3) : 192,500 - 199,750
- C (2.0) : 182,500 - 192,250
- C- (1.7) : 175,000 - 182,250
- D+ (1.3) : 167,500 - 174,750
- D (1.0) : 157,500 - 167,350
- D- (0.7) : 150,000 - 157,250
- E (0.0) : less than 150,000

The thresholds are absolute: e.g., 217,000 is a B. Don’t bug us for an extra point at the end of the
semester; instead, keep track of your score as you go, and take advantage of the pick-up quests (extra credit).

**Grade revision requests**

If you believe we made a grading mistake, you can contest it. Here are the rules:

1. There’s a 24-hour waiting period from receipt of your grade before you can contest it. This gives you time to think through your objections and make a cogent argument (and maybe decide it was fair).

2. More important, there is a week-long window after receipt to contest any given grade; when that window closes, after seven days, the grade is considered accurate and further requests for changes won't be accepted.

If you do want to make a revision request, please submit it to your GSI.

This is the crucial thing to understand about grading in this class: it's not a secret, and it's not on a curve, so you can take responsibility for your grade. This is good for you, because you can tell exactly how you're doing and how to optimize your effort for this course, and good for us, because it prevents end-of-semester grade negotiations, which are usually (let's be honest) ludicrous exercises in cajolery.

**Academic integrity**

All students in this course will be held to high standards of scholarship and integrity. Personal responsibility and integrity are assumed, and all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct are prohibited. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for you or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the class.

You should draw on the ideas and writings of others in your work, but you must not plagiarize. Plagiarism is a serious academic crime for which you can be expelled from the university. Whenever you use information or ideas taken from someone else, credit the source. Learn and use the APA format for citations ([see the UM Library citation guide](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/procedures/index.html)). In addition, *direct* (word for word) quotations of phrases and sentences, if used, must appear in quotation marks. Plagiarism is trivial to detect: we're not stupid, and Google exists; the same search that leads you to the source you lift lines from leads us to discover it.

Issues of academic integrity will be handled according to the policies established by LSA. [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/procedures/index.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/procedures/index.html).

**Students with disabilities**
The University of Michigan provides reasonable accommodations for all students with disabilities. To ensure that your needs are met in a timely manner, please contact the instructor with any requests for accommodation as early in the term as possible. For additional information on services and support, visit UM Services for Students with Disabilities at: http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/. I will treat any information you provide as private and confidential.

Class schedule and preparation assignments

The schedule of class topics, and the required preparation assignments are maintained in a separate document posted in the “Syllabus” section of CTools. You are expected to check it regularly. Unless marked optional, all preparation assignments are required reading (or viewing) before that week’s discussion sections, and are fair game for the graded quizzes and final. You can earn extra credit if you prepare reaction papers to optional preparation assignments (see Captain’s Logs in Pick Up Quests).

Quests!

“You take people, you put them on a journey, you give them peril, you find out who they really are.”
— Joss Whedon

Life is a journey, and this course is part of your journey. All journeys have destinations: we hope yours for this journey includes learning (more about this below!)

Interesting journeys present adventures and challenges. Along your SI / UC 110 journey you will have the opportunity to fulfill various quests. The more successful you are on your quests, the closer you will get to your learning destination.

In this course, we accrue “XP”, which are experience points that you gain to get to different grade levels. If you can gather 237,500 XP, you will receive an A, not to mention the admiration of those around you. Because you’re in charge of figuring out how many XP you need to get the grade you want, there’s not really such a thing as a required assignment in this course. There are opportunities to gain XP, some of which are scheduled. Of course, you’ll need to do several Quests in order to get higher grade levels, and some Quests count for a ton of XP.

We’ll record your points, and you can track your progress in the CTools Gradebook. This is the first time we’ve used this tool for this kind of grading, so be patient with us if we have to make some adjustments along the way.

A quick note on our assessment philosophy. Quest descriptions will include rubrics, which spell out our expectations. Just meeting the minimum requirements of a quest is acceptable, but not outstanding. “Acceptable” work ultimately earns you somewhere around a B. If your goal is to get an A, you will have to go above and beyond on some of these quests. (You know, like in real life: you don’t think you become a leader and best by just doing the minimum, do you?)

1 I don’t know the actual source of this quote. Here is where I found it: https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/217705-you-take-people-you-put-them-on-a-journey-you.
This course has three types of quests: Adventures (regular, scheduled quests you'll know about all semester), Pick Up Quests (irregular and occasional) and Side Quests (irregular, occasional and for extra credit). Below we describe the quests briefly; the details for each are in a separate documents available (or will be soon) on CTools. In addition we have prepared an FAQ with rules and best practices for all quests: you are required to read this and follow it (failure to do so will result in reduced XP).

*J.R.R. Tolkien lived in a different age, and was a bit of an old fogey (even when he was young). Though he evidently thought race diversity (though not skin color) was important, he didn’t include any women in the fellowship. On our journey, we welcome all genders etc. etc.!

**Adventures!**

These quests are scheduled throughout the term, and have differing degrees of difficulty. Remember to read the document describing each quest in detail before trying to complete one.


“Experience is the best teacher of all. And for that, there are no guarantees that one will become an artist. Only the journey matters.” – Henry Callahan

In this quest, you give thought to what you want to accomplish along the journey. What would you consider to be success? Hint: You’re letting yourself down if your only objective is a good grade.

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Occupy Social Media proposal – 22 Jan 2014 – Unlock OSM draft (4/7/14)

Occupy Social Media is one of two major quests this semester; see below (4/21/14). You need to submit a proposal for a social media site you don’t already use that you plan to occupy, and your objectives in doing so.

Test of Mettle 1 – 3 Feb 2014 – 7,500 XP

We will have three 20-minute in-class quizzes during the semester for you to demonstrate your mastery of the preparation materials (readings and videos) and lectures. Laptops required (or another device compatible with CTools, which requires one of the common browsers). If you do not have a device you can bring that enables you to use CTools, you must inform your GSI at least a week in advance so we can make arrangements for a loaner.

Bag a Peak draft – 12 Feb 2014 – Unlock Bag a Peak (2/26/14)

This is another of the major quests for the semester (see 2/26/14). You should submit a first draft now; we will get comments back to you quickly, focused on whether you are addressing the assignment properly and what you need to do to earn lots of XP. If you choose to skip this quest, not only will you not earn XP on it, but you almost surely will earn substantially fewer XP on the final quest because our feedback will be really helpful!

The draft is not a finished product. It should summarize what you plan on doing, and give a clear indication of how you will do it. A strong draft has the following elements:

- **Reflection paper**
  - The topic for the reflection paper
  - An outline for the argument of your paper
  - 1-2 sources for your chosen topic
  - At least 2 paragraphs, one of which contains a potential thesis statement relating to your topic.

- **Annotated bibliography**
  - 2-3+ sources
  - The topic of your annotated bibliography, pulling from the four class themes
  - At least one annotation for one of your sources. This will give us an idea of how you are going to summarize the resources, connect it to your topic, and if you are providing enough depth or analysis.
  - If possible try to give us an idea of the different types of resources that you are thinking of including. For example, we want a variety of credible sources like journal articles, chapters from books, news articles, videos etc.

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3 Three quests are pass / fail, but are required to “unlock” other quests: if you do not complete them you will not be allowed to do the quests that need the keys. For example, if you don’t do the OSM proposal, you can’t do the OSM draft, and if you don’t do the OSM draft you can’t do the OSM (worth up to 37,500 XP).
• **Infographic**
  - Both infographics have a topic chosen
  - At least one data set has been located for each
  - An idea of what you want to communicate that demonstrates you understand that an infographic is not just one graph or chart, it's a combination of charts and graphs (and some words) that tell a story (e.g. "I want people to understand how Apple's decision to do x,y,z changed the landscape for designing a,b,c")
  - If possible, know what design tool you want to work with so we can give you guidance on how to use it to produce your infographic

• **Case study**
  - A clear and useful (for the client) research question
  - Specific characterization of the case under study
  - Clarity and strength of the argument of value of case study
  - Use of evidence from a variety of sources (cite where necessary)

Put yourself out there (public authorship) – 17 Feb 2014 – 17,500 XP

“He who deliberates fully before taking a step will spend his entire life on one leg.” – Chinese Proverb

In this quest, you will work as teams (set up in your discussion sections) to improve (or maybe create) a Wikipedia page. You’ll be learning about working together to advance on your journey, and you’ll be exposing yourself to interaction with, and the judgment of the public. Did you think quests were supposed to be easy?

Test of Mettle 2 – 24 Feb 2014 – 7,500 XP

Bag a Peak due – 26 Feb 2014 – 37,500 XP

"If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all." – Queen Elizabeth I

You will attempt to scale ONE of these four different peaks (see details in the CTools assignment descriptions):

• Case study of an online information resource. You will evaluate it using criteria we have covered in the first part of the course.
• Infographic. You will create an information resource that uses storytelling techniques to communicate effectively about one of the topics in this course.
• Annotated reading list. You will find several resources related to one of the topics in this class, read (or otherwise absorb) them, and then prepare brief thoughtful, *critical* comments on each.

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5 We’re using critical in its *second* sense here: crit·i·cal  (krt-kl), adj.
• Reflection paper. You will have a choice of several topics, one of which you will explore and then present a thoughtful five-page essay on it, stating a claim and then persuading us that the claim is true.

Discussion section first-half participation – 26 Feb 2014 – 12,500 XP

**Discussion** (dɪskˈʃən)  
*n.*  
1. Consideration of a subject by a group; an earnest conversation.  

You are expected to participate in discussion sections. You will earn XP based on how well you do on this quest, just like others: How engaged have you been? How have you supported your fellow students? How much better is section for having you in it? We give you separate XP for the first and second half so you get feedback in time to adjust your effort on this quest. We will post your first-half participation sometime after your section this week, and before your section the week after you return from break.

Test of Mettle 3 – 26 Mar 2014 – 7,500 XP

**Occupy Social Media draft** – 7 April 2014 – Unlock OSM (4/21/14)

Just as with the other major project quest (Bag a Peak), you should submit a draft of your OSM quest (see 4/21/14). We will get feedback to you quickly. If you choose to skip this quest, not only will you not earn XP on it, but you almost surely will earn substantially fewer XP on the final quest because our feedback will be really helpful!

**Occupy Social Media** - 21 April 2014 -- 43,750 XP

“From the streets of Cairo and the Arab Spring, to Occupy Wall Street, from the busy political calendar to the aftermath of the tsunami in Japan, social media was not only sharing the news but driving it.” – Dan Rather

You will have selected a social media platform you don’t currently use (remember the proposal quest on 1/22/14?). Then you spend the semester participating on the site, culminating in a final report that shows 1) evidence of your activity over the semester and 2) your assessment of the site using some of the frameworks provided by the course.

1. Inclined to judge severely and find fault.  
2. Characterized by careful, exact evaluation and judgment: a critical reading.  
This is the meaning intended when we talk about “critical thinking” (thinking carefully, not necessarily negatively).

Discussion section second half participation – 21 April 2014 – 18,750 XP

We are providing you with XP for second half participation in discussion section. You’ll be more experienced by now, so our standards are higher...and you can earn more XP this time. We’ll post your XP before the final exam quest.

Lecture participation – 21 April 2014 – 18,750 XP

We also expect you to participate in lectures. We’ll know from LectureTools whether you attended class, and whether you participated in various classroom activities. And remember the golden rule (don’t be rude)? Your classroom comportment is part of the quest, too.

Face the Sensei – 30 April 2014 – 37,500 XP

At the end of your journey you will come before the sensei (well, a screen that looks a lot like Ctools) and demonstrate the mastery you have achieved in a final examination.

Pick Up Quests!

"Así es la vida". What’s a journey without some surprise challenges?

These quests happen at random times during the semester, and many of them will be announced as we go along. You may complete a MAXIMUM OF FIVE Explorer Reports or Captain’s Logs (combined) for points (if you submit more, we’ll drop the lowest point scores). In addition, you can complete up to a MAXIMUM OF FIVE Side Quests.

Explorer Reports -- Due maximum of 7 days after the event -- 7,500 XP each

We have lots of guest speakers who come to UM, and many of them have topics related to the course content. Attend a talk and write up a one page report of the talk to receive credit for this quest. We’ll list lots of opportunities for these throughout the term. If you see a talk that is relevant to the course that we haven’t listed, please suggest it to your GSI and we may add it.

Captain’s Logs -- Due maximum of 7 days after the lecture -- 7,500 XP each

There are several readings marked as “optional” on the schedule (and we’ll probably add more as the semester goes along). You can earn 7,500 XP by reading one and writing a one page thoughtful reaction paper. This is not a summary of the reading: you should identify a point or claim or argument that you find interesting, explain why it’s interesting, and why you agree or disagree with it (or extend it).

For complete assignment descriptions please go to the CTools Assignment folder and click on the relevant assignment. These are only explanations and not complete descriptions of the assignments.

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7 Stuff happens.
Side quests! -- 7,500 XP each
Often, people want us to have you participate in research, or have you attend an event of some sort. Participation in these activities will earn you side quest points for extra credit. You can have up to five of these. We’ll announce them when they arise.