SI 551: Information Seeking Behavior
School of Information, University of Michigan, Winter 2013

Class: Tuesday 1-4 PM; 2245 North Quad
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COURSE OVERVIEW
This course provides students with an introduction to human information behavior focusing on how human beings interact with people, various forms of information, information systems, services, and technology to seek and utilize information. Information seeking behavior is a fundamental intellectual activity that facilitates problem solving, decision making, and knowledge creation. An understanding of information behavior is central to work in the information professions and as an information scientist. This course is organized as three units.

- Unit 1: Foundations of Information Behavior surveys major frameworks, theories, models, and concepts of information behavior, drawing from primarily from library and information science and Human-Computer interaction.
- Unit II: Methods for Studying Information Behavior introduces various methods and provides hands-on experience with ethnographic approaches. Students learn techniques for collecting observation data, taking field notes, and designing and conducting ethnographic interviews.
- Unit III: Information Seeking in Contexts approaches information behavior within diverse contexts such as academic contexts, work contexts, personal and social contexts, healthcare, learning environments, and use of social media.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
The purpose of this course is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of human information behavior that will serve as a theoretical and professional base in designing and providing user-centered services and systems.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and apply theories and models of information seeking behavior across library and information science and human-computer interaction
- Implement ethnographic research methods that will enable them to understand information behaviors within various information seeking and use contexts
- Incorporate strong user-centered perspectives into the design and development of information products, systems, and services
- Analyze the information behavior of particular user groups in order to provide effective information products, systems, and services

COURSE MATERIALS
Required readings: All students (551 and 751) must read these weekly readings before each class. These readings are critical for you to be able to understand the lecture and participate in class discussions. The readings are available on our SI 551 CTools site.
Lecture notes: All course-related resources including lecture notes, in-class activities, sample assignments will be made available on SI 551 CTools site.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

- In-class and online discussion participation: 10%
- Self Analysis of Information Behavior: 20% (Due February 12)
- Group Presentation: 15% (varies from Week 9 to Week 14)
- Fieldwork Report: 20% (Due March 19)
- Research Project: 35%
  - Project Title and Topic Statement (Due February 26)
  - Final Paper (Due April 23)

All papers should include the following items: Student’s name and email address, course number, and the unique title of your paper

Late Submission Policy
I use a 100-point scale to grade assignments. To be fair to students who have worked hard to meet the deadline, points will be deducted for late submissions (2 points per day, including weekends). Under only exceptional circumstances (medical issues or job interviews, etc), you need to get formal permission for an extension from the instructor in advance of the due date.

Assignment Submission
Submission methods vary depending on the assignment:
- Research Project Title and Topic Statement: Post to CTools site – Wiki.
- Group Presentation: Post your group’s handout to CTools-Forum. I will make copies for the class. It is strongly recommended that one of the group members post a Word or PDF file on CTools-Forum no later than 9 AM on their presentation day.
- All other assignments will be submitted through CTools-Assignments.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
All written submissions must be your own, original work. You may incorporate selected excerpts from publications by other authors, but they must be clearly marked as quotations and must be attributed. If you build on the ideas of prior authors, you must cite their work. You may obtain copy editing assistance and you may discuss your ideas with others, but all substantive writing and ideas must be your own or be explicitly attributed to another. See the Rackham Graduate policy on Academic and Professional Integrity http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/statement_on_academic_integrity/ for the definition of plagiarism and associated consequences.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course such as the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way we teach may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (http://ssd.umich.edu/) to help us determine appropriate accommodations. SSD (phone: 734-763-3000) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. I will treat any information you provide as private and confidential.
SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan. 15): Introduction to Information Seeking Behavior

Week 2 (Jan. 22): Key Concepts in Information Behavior; Information Needs and Seeking; Browsing; Information Encountering; Avoiding Information


Week 3 (Jan. 29): Information Evaluation; Relevance and Credibility Assessments


Week 4 (Feb. 5): Theories and Models of Information Behavior


Week 5 (Feb. 12): Methods for studying Information Behavior


Week 6 (Feb. 19): Ethnography Workshop, Part 1; Observation and Fieldnotes


**Week 7 (Feb. 26): Ethnography Workshop, Part 2: Ethnographic Interview; Analysis of Qualitative Data**


**Week 8 (March 5): Spring Break – No Class**

**Week 9 (March 12): Information behavior in academic settings**


**Week 10 (March 19): Information behavior in professional work contexts**


**Week 11 (March 26): Information behavior in personal and social contexts**


**Week 12 (April 2): Information behavior in science, medicine, and health**


**Week 13 (April 9): Youth information behavior; Digital media and learning**


**Week 14 (April 16): Information behavior and social media**


**Week 15 (April 23): Wrap-up; Presentation and Discussion of Research Project**
SI 551/751: Self-Analysis of Information Behavior (20%)

Due date: February 12

This exercise requires that you report on your own information seeking and use behavior. It gives you an opportunity to observe your own behavior, putting you in the role of both a study subject (as an information seeker) and a researcher. Specifically, this assignment involves the following steps:

1. Begin this assignment thinking about the information activities you engage in during a typical day. Select an activity you would like to analyze and report. Regarding that activity, identify system, technology, services are involved.
2. Once you narrow down a focus for your study of your information seeking behavior, you'll need to develop a system for keeping track of your actions in the system/technology/services. You'll be observing your own information behavior for a continuous 10-hour period, so you'll need to be able to record multiple “episodes” of information activity.
3. Observe your own information behavior for a continuous 10-hour period and record your behavior systematically using the diary form you have developed. You will need to observe your behavior manually rather than relying on software capturing your activities.
4. Do NOT record purely internal events, such as your thoughts, feelings, or dreams. Rather, you will need to keep tracking your interaction with a certain type of information, information system, or digital media.
5. Once you have completed your self-observation, read the course readings for Weeks 2-4, and select one of the models or theories with which to analyze your information behavior. If you think that none of the theories/models we covered in class work for you, feel free to look beyond the ones presented- the *Theories of Information Behavior* book should be useful.
6. Discuss the results of your analyses. How did you a particular model/theory affect your interpretation of your information behavior? How useful the model and theory for explaining your behavior? Your discussion also should demonstrate that you have understood the concepts of information, information needs, information seeking, and information behavior as discussed in class.

This assignment can be completed in about 4-5 pages (single-spaced).

Your paper will be evaluated based on the following criteria: description of your focus area for your behavior to be recorded; techniques of collecting and keeping track of the behavior data; analysis of the data; applying pertinent models/theories to interpret the data; discussion of the implications of your experience; paper presentation and format.

SI 551: Group Presentation (15% - Presentation 10% & Handout 5%)

Due date: Varies between Week 9 to Week 14

For this assignment students will work in groups to identify, organize and present additional refereed and professional publications on the week’s topic (from Week 9 to Week 14). In the Background survey form, please check off the topics you are most interested in. I will form and announce groups for this assignment by February 7.

Each student in the group will need to find relevant articles beyond the class readings for the topic. Arrange a group meeting in order to select “best and most credible articles.” The group will eventually select three additional articles about the topic (beyond class readings). All group members must read all of the selected articles and discuss them together, considering the following issues:

1. What did the members of the group learn about the topic from looking at the additional literature?
2. How does the topic relate to your current understanding of information seeking (this doesn’t have to be an academic response, common sense and experience is acceptable).
3. What do you see as outstanding issues and trends with the topic? Try to make a good cohesive argument.

This assignment has two components: Presentation and Handout:

**Presentation should last no more than 30 minutes.** Be lively and include some interaction with the audience. Groups can initiate discussions, present panels, or lead class exercises. Presentation may include visual aids (e.g., slides) to display citations, brief outlines, figures or charts.

On the week assigned, the presenting group will distribute the Handout which includes brief outline (1-2 pages) of the entire presentation along with a list of references that the group used for the presentation.

**SI 551: Fieldwork Report (20%)**

**Due date: March 19**

For this assignment, you are to select a site where you will observe people’s information behavior for a total of 6 hours. Choose a site which is naturally public (e.g., library, bookstore, cafe, playground, train station, shopping mall, etc). Do not choose the airport (because of security issues). Do not observe in online settings. To conduct observation for 6 hours, you must make a trip to your site about three times. If possible, try to observe during different time slots (morning, afternoon, evening; weekdays, weekends) in order to capture a variety of different people and activities. All observations should be conducted in the same place. I assume that your role as an observer is as a non-participant, which provides you with the freedom to concentrate entirely on observation and enables you to become very sensitive to the significance of what is occurring.

One of the purposes of this assignment is to give you practice in recording field notes. Field notes are the observer’s record of the observation. They include descriptions of the setting and its purpose, who was present and why people appeared to come to the site, a drawing of the setting’s layout, documentation of happenings in general and the types of information that people sought or shared in particular. Another aspect of field notes includes the observer’s reflections regarding various issues, such as the process of selecting what was important to capture given all that was occurring, problems in observing and recording, and suggestions for next steps. Usually, the observer’s comments are presented separately from the field notes so that their opinions are distinguished from their actual observations. Such comments can be labeled “O.C.” for “Observer Comment.”

Your fieldwork report should be about 7-8 pages (single-spaced). You can choose a format for your paper. You can either provide a summary of the field work that you’ve conducted in 2-3 pages and simply attach the field notes (or parts of your field notes) or you can write up detailed discussions and findings from your field work and insert your field notes into your report.

Your paper will be evaluated based on the following criteria: Your description of the population, context, and scope of your field, your depiction of the fieldwork setting, the level of detail and depth of your fieldnotes, your insights and interpretations of the instances observed, and what you were able to identify in terms of information behavior patterns.
SI 551 Research Project (35%)

Approval of Project Title and Topic Statement – Due February 26

Final Paper – Due April 23

For this final project, you are expected to carry out a small, but real, piece of research by investigating the information behavior of a particular user group. You will need to identify a user group, apply models and concepts from the course readings and other literature, conduct interviews, and draw conclusions about the information behavior of your selected user group.

Choose an identifiable user group to be studied. It will be wise to choose a group for which a body of published research is available. You need to look for and read research papers on potential topics even before you decide on a topic. In the previous years, students have written on the following groups: engineers, mathematicians, nurses, physicians, journalists, securities analysts, landscape architects, health educators, and college athletic coaches. Others have written on more obscure groups such as people with a vegetarian diet, knitters, storytellers, video gamers, first time home buyers, science fiction fans, youth who are interested in political information, and musicians.

Once you select a user group, you will need to review and synthesize the literature related to that group and then use this literature as a jumping off point to collect original data from members of the group. You can include 5-10 publications for your literature review. For data collection, recruit 4-5 subjects for interviews. Contact them individually to schedule an interview. Plan to conduct each ethnographic interview at the subject’s work place or home if possible (wherever their information seeking about your topic would take place). Each interview should take about 1-1.5 hours. Before going out in the field, draft a set of interview questions. Practice it with one “pilot subject” (a friend/classmate who is ideally a member of the user group you’ve chosen) and then revise the questions based on your pilot. When you conduct interviews with the actual study subjects, plan to audio record each interview.

You can conduct this project individually or as a pair. Working with a classmate certainly has advantages, especially when you conduct the interviews, but it is not required for this term project. Some people work better as a sole author while others would prefer to work with another classmate. So, it is really your choice.

The following milestones will guide you in completing the project.

Project Title and Topic Statement

Post a title for your paper along with a short statement about the user group that you will be studying on our CTools Wiki. In this statement, include your motivation for choosing your particular user group. You will need to get the approval from the instructor by Feb. 26.

Final Paper

You are expected to write a scholarly research paper for your project. Your paper will consist of roughly five parts as follows:

1. Introduction: Describe the background and purpose of your study. Justify your choice of user group – why did you think it would be worth studying?
2. Literature review: Show you have an understanding of related literature and you can contextualize your topic with previous work.
3. Methods: Discuss in detail the methods, procedures (e.g., when, where, how you collected the data) and instruments (e.g., interview questions) you used.
4. Results: Report your findings. Rather than trying to report on everything you’ve learned, try to present your “major” findings. You may want to highlight three or four points from your
findings.
(5) Conclusion: Conclude your paper by discussing the implications of your findings for system design, information services, and/or user/staff training.

Your paper should be about 8-10 pages long (single-spaced).

The format for citations in text and for references should follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA Style).

Final papers will be graded based on the following criteria: (1) Does the paper justify the significance of studying this particular user group? (2) Does the paper cite an appropriate selection of literature? (3) Does the paper provide an adequate description of your methods? (4) Are results presented clearly and analyzed appropriately? (5) Does the paper clearly identify any implications for research, practice, or society? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper? (6) Has attention been paid to the clarity of presentation, format of citations and references, and quality of tables/graphs?