S520: Information Behavior in Digital and Non-Digital Environments

Spring 2013

About the Course
Instructor: Hamid R. Ekbia
Day and Time: Wed 1:00 PM- 3:45 PM
Location: LI 031
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Course Summary
This course will help students to think critically and creatively about how people contribute, seek, find, manage, evaluate and use information related to various aspects of their everyday life in both digital and non-digital environments (including the Web, Intranet, digital libraries etc.). We will examine these topics from both theoretical and practical standpoints. Students will conduct a number of field exercises to sensitize themselves to the challenges involved in user-centered design of information services, products, and systems. This course will incorporate recent theoretical perspectives from IS and Communication literature and research on the theme of context and the increasing emphasis on social networks and social media in organizational and non-organizational contexts.

Students will learn how to observe, analyze, and think about information related behavior among a variety of groups, in a plethora of digital and non-digital environments. Then students will develop skills and knowledge that they can apply to the design or improvement of information related systems and services.

This course is useful for scholars from a variety of fields, including researchers of new media/social media, advertising and public relations, health communication, MLS, MIS and HCI. It will support scholars' future work in a variety of information related services, and in applied contexts such as HCI, information retrieval and IS design.

At the end of this course you can
1. Critically examine theoretical frameworks for studying communication and information related behavior in digitally mediated and non-mediated environments.
2. Understand a number of the basic concepts informing the study of relationships between people, communication and information.
3. Survey current research methods to study information related behavior.
4. Determine the factors that may predict or influence a user's search for, use of, and perceptions of information, information products, services, and systems.
5. Examine patterns of information behavior among specific social groups.

Key questions addressed by the course
1. How do people look for information in different environments?

2. How is information used by the seeker?

3. What factors are involved in information-seeking (e.g., social relations, institutional structures, culture, psychology, emotions, rational choice, literacy, economics, technology, infrastructure)? How are these factors interrelated and how do they collectively influence information seeking and use in different environments?

4. Why is certain information useful to one person or group, and not useful to another?

5. Do people find information without necessarily looking for it? How and why do people scan their environment for information?

**Questions that help to inform the improvement and design of information systems and services**

1. How do we think about the design of information products, systems, and services from a user-centered standpoint?

2. How can we study different groups of people in order to determine their information needs, information-seeking behavior, and information use?

3. What methods are most appropriate, alone or in combination?

4. What is user-centered design and what are some ways of designing with user involvement?
Calendar/Readings

All readings will be made available online on Oncourse.

Week-1: 01/09/2013: General overview of the course

Readings

Week-2: 01/16/2013: Focus on the person -- Users, actors, and needs

Readings

Week-3: 01/23/2013, - Seeking, finding, and using information: Cognitive models

Guest Lecture: Dr. Ratan Suri, Telecommunication, IU, Bloomington

Readings

Week-4: 01/30/2013- Additional models in information seeking

Assignment #1 Summary & critique, due in class, 01/30/2013.
Readings


Week-5: 02/06/2013-A social network perspective to information seeking and use
Readings


Week-6: 02/13/2013 - Research methods in information seeking and behavior
Readings


Week-7:02/20/2013 - Affect and emotion
Assignment #2 - Document and analyze your own information seeking experience
Due on 02/20/2013

Readings


Week-8: 02/27/2013- Seeking, finding, and using information: Contextual approaches

Readings


Week-9: 03/06/2013 - Contextual approaches: Everyday life information seeking
Guest Lecturer: Professor Andrea Copeland, SLIS, IUPUI


Week 10: Spring Break:

Week-11: 03/20/2013- Seeking, finding, and using information: Institutional models

Assignment #3: Observe and analyze an information-seeking experience or situation of another person Due 03/20/2013


Week 12: 03/27/2013-New media social media and information behavior


Week-13:04/03/2013 - Information seeking in unusual contexts

Assignment #4 Research method case study due 04/03/2013


Week-14: 04/10/2013- Information behavior/ Information literacy in Video games and immersive environments

Readings


Week-15: 04/17/2013- Personal Information Management (PIM)


Assignments

The assignments have been laid out in chronological order of submission.

Students will be evaluated on knowledge and expression of basic concepts, preparation for class, in-class participation, and practical applications of what we have learned in class. Exercises will include observing information-seeking episodes, interviewing hypothetical clients about their information behavior, and studying information flows and usage within a group or organization. Descriptions follow below.

1. (10%) In class participation and preparation
2. (5% X 2= 10%) Opening and closing summary/critiques.
3. (20%) Document and analyze your own information-seeking experience.
4. (20%) Observe and analyze someone else’s information-seeking experience or situation.
5. (5%) Case study on research method.
6. (35%) Research Study Proposal: Write a proposal for how you would study the information needs of a selected organization, institution, or population group, and justify your choice(s) of research method(s).

In-class participation and preparation for class (10%)

Attendance is required in this course. Students are expected to notify the instructor if a class will be missed. Your in-class participation should demonstrate a critical assessment of the readings and your grasp of the course material as a whole. There are five assignments for the course, each constituting 20% of the final grade.

Assignment-1 (Ongoing)

This assignment has two components (10% each)

1. You read at least one of the readings for each session, and provide your reflection of that reading on the course Wiki by 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday before the class.
2. You lead the class discussion for one session during the semester. For this purpose, you need to do two things: (i) Read and synthesize ALL of the
readings of that week; (ii) Read and summarize all the contributions to the course Wiki for that week.

**Assignment 2: (Due 02/20/2013). Presentations on 02/20 and 02/27**

**Documenting and analyzing your own information seeking experience**

Document and analyze your own information-seeking experience.

For this assignment, you will first keep a short diary over a period of hours or days that covers an information-seeking experience that has an identifiable beginning and end. It does not have to be unique nor does it have to be resolved; in other words, you can locate the experience as part of a broader concern. Then you will write up what you thought, felt, and did, and how you understand that experience in light of the readings and discussions we have covered in class so far. Here are some steps to take:

1. Focus on a particular information seeking process. It does not have to be Internet-based: you may also go to find out something downtown, or conduct a term paper bibliography search, or an archive search. It must be more than a simple look-up!

2. Take careful notes (or speak into a recorder) regarding how, when, and why you figured out you needed something. Then document what steps you took, how you felt about each step and what you were thinking. At what point were you satisfied enough to stop and think about it all?

Based on the literature we have seen, write up a report on what the information-seeking experience consisted of.

Here are some components you may include:

1. What information need(s) were you seeking to satisfy? What factors may have prompted this need? How do you gauge the importance of this need in the larger picture?

2. What kinds of sources did you consult (signage, books, friends, intermediaries, search engines, etc.?) In what ways did these sources prove helpful or not helpful? Why do you think you used them in the order you used them?

3. What kinds of barriers did you note? What advantages do you have in your own information world because of your education, training, or prior knowledge?

4. Were you satisfied with the outcome of the information seeking process?

Write 5-8 pages only, spending more time on interpretation and less time on a blow-by-blow account of what happened. Be sure to relate your comments to the readings (cite them correctly) and lecture/discussions. Don't be afraid to interpret - but also don't forget to qualify your interpretations.

In addition to the description of the process you observed, discuss what you have learned about information seeking as a result of this observation.

**Assignment 3**

**Observing and analyzing someone else's information-seeking experience or situation (Due 03/20/2013). Presentations on 03/20 and 03/27**
For this assignment, you will observe and interpret an individual information-seeking experience in relation to both cognitive and social/institutional analysis of the kind we have covered so far. You will need to recruit a participant who will engage in information-seeking behavior with you as observer. It would be best if your collaborator has not recently taken this course. The behavior needs to be plausible (i.e., the person does not make up an unrelated information goal for your sake). It also needs to be more complex than looking up the weather report, or some such quotidian activity.

Here are some steps to take:

1. Recruit a subject (friend, relative, etc.) who is willing to allow you to observe and record one of his/her information-seeking experiences.

2. Focus on a particular information seeking process. It does not have to be Internet-based: you may also go along to find out something downtown, or watch a term paper bibliography search, or accompany an archive search.

3. Try to find out as much as possible about the subject's education & knowledge, as well as his/her social, cultural, and institutional environment either before or during the search.

4. As your subject interacts with various information systems, have him or her "think aloud," telling you what s/he is doing, what thoughts this provokes, what s/he will do next and why. Be sure to pay attention to human, technological, and institutional types of sources.

5. Take careful notes on what the subject says and does. Try not to suggest alternative approaches or intervene in the search process in any way; take care to minimize your influence on the information seeking process. (If you must, promise you will offer your opinions afterwards!)

6. During the actual search you may prompt the subject if s/he forgets to think aloud by asking questions such as: "What are you thinking now?" or "Why did you do that?"

7. After the information seeking appears to have reached an end, you should briefly interview the subject to collect further information on the individual's social and institutional context that relates to what you have observed. You may also ask them to clarify anything that was not clear to you as you observed their information seeking process.

Based on the literature we have seen, and what you observed, write up a report on what the information-seeking experience consisted of. Here are some components you may include:

1. What information need(s) was the subject seeking to satisfy? What motivated the search? What personal, organizational, institutional, or other broader constraints and enablers can you factor into the way the person conducted the search?

2. What kinds of sources did the subject consult (signage, books, friends, intermediaries, search engines, etc.?). In what ways did these sources prove helpful? Why do you think these were chosen? Think big.

3. Was the subject satisfied with the outcome of the information seeking process?
Write 5-8 pages only, spending more time on interpretation and less time on a blow-by-blow account of what happened. Be sure to relate your comments to at least three of the readings so far (cite them correctly) and lecture/discussions. Don't be afraid to interpret - but also don't forget to qualify your interpretations.

In addition to the description of the process you observed, compare the experience of observing yourself with the experience of observing someone else.

Assignment 4
Research methods case studies (Due, 04/03/2013)

You will read a case study of information behavior reflecting both a research method and a user group. Summarize the case study for the class, briefly but vividly enough so that everyone understands what the researchers looked for and how they went about it. Comment substantively on the method(s) used for the research and reflect on their usefulness and appropriateness for that user group. The findings are not as important as the match between a) the goal of the researcher, b) the nature of the user group, and c) the methods used. Turn in your 2-page summary/critique on Oncourse.

One-third of students will present each week between 04/03 and 04/17. A sign-up sheet will go around on 03/27 so that everyone can plan ahead. You may request a specific study before the day of your presentation by sending the instructor an e-mail.

You can pick case studies from the following list:

Surveys and Questionnaires


Observation


**Interviewing**


**Assignment 5**

**Research proposal**

**Final assignments are due during the exam week.** We can make specific plans about the logistics of submission, when we meet in class.

Write a proposal for how you would study the information needs of a selected organization, institution, or population group, and justify your choice(s) of research method(s) The purpose of this assignment is to prepare you for assessing the information needs of populations that you may serve as a professional. You will prepare the assignment as a proposal, as if you had been assigned the job by a superior, or were trying to obtain a contract as an independent consultant.

This is what you will do:

1. Select a group that is of interest to you. The group should be one served by librarians or other information professionals -- for example, small business owners, young adults, industrial chemists, college students in a first-year English class,
genealogists, musicians, preschoolers, free-lance journalists, home schooling parents, international university students, cancer patients, vegetarians, public library board members, people with visual challenges, etc.

2. Conduct a literature search to find out if others have studied the information needs of this group, or of a group that shares its characteristics in some way. If no one has, your work will be more difficult, but you can still do a good job.

3. Make contact with at least one member of this group, and draw on that person's insights in constructing your description. You may also consult with information professionals who offer services to your user group. If you cannot make personal contact, try to find a representative of your group, or information professional who serves your group on the Internet (e.g., through a relevant listserv or homepage email address). See if the person will answer a few questions about his or her information needs.

4. Review the literature we have covered on research methods, to select one or more methods you feel are most appropriate for studying your group. Decide how the methods would be applied and what you would do with the data afterwards.

Then write up, in 8-10 pages plus bibliography

1. Description of the group.

2. Summary of published literature addressing the information needs of this group, or if there is none useful whatsoever, state that. Mention in your write-up where you searched. Also provide insights into this group's preferred information-seeking behavior.

3. Discussion of information-needs assessment method(s) looked at, rejected, chosen, and why.


5. Discussion of how the resulting data will be synthesized and turned into useful form, and how you think it would help your group to know this data.

=>Remember, this is a plan that shows how well you can match user research methods to people and situations, and not a full user group study.

Closing summary & critique (Nov, last day of class) (5% each) Brief essay on one of that week’s readings.