Information Insight I

(JOUR 860: Fall 2016)

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Office hours
I may occasionally have online office hours, but I have found it more effective just to set up appointments. If you'd like to talk by phone, Slack, Skype, Blackboard Collaborate or other means, just let me know.

Schedule
We won't have live class meetings, but most assignments will be due on either Sundays or Wednesdays.

What this course is about

This is the introductory course to the journalism master's program in digital content strategy. It will introduce students to the broad concepts and theories of information, media, and audiences; and lay the foundation for learning online.

One of the primary goals is to provide students with a base of knowledge they can use to identify their direction and goals as they work toward a certificate or a master's degree. Another goal is to elevate students' abilities as critical thinkers, helping them explore new ideas and think through problems more systematically.

This is not a top-down class. I provide structure for the class but rely on students to identify areas important to them, to pursue those areas on their own, and to share their ideas with the class. The goal is to empower students and to help them develop a mindset of constant learning.

The course will be entirely online and will primarily use Blackboard, OneNote and Slack for course materials and communication. (See below for more details.) Online learning requires much self-discipline on your part. It is much like an independent study. You will need to schedule time to do readings, listen to podcasts, watch videos, engage in online discussions, and complete assignments. We will have no quizzes or tests. Rather, students will demonstrate their mastery of course material through written work, online discussions, and other assignments.

We will not have any required live meetings online, but you will have deadlines each week. It is important to keep up. If you run into difficulties, please let me know so we can head off problems early.

Course goals

By the end of this course, students will achieve these goals:

- ❖ Demonstrate understanding of the broad concepts and theories of information, media and audiences.
- ❖ Demonstrate strong critical thinking skills.
- ❖ Demonstrate an ability to interact and share ideas with classmates in an online setting.
- ❖ Identify individual direction and goals for their certificate or degree.

Program goals

The goals for this course are intended to provide a foundation of skills and knowledge for students so they can work toward the larger goals of the master's degree and its component certificates:

- ❖ Manage the flood of information that workers and organizations must grapple with in today's digital world.
- ❖ Find, organize, analyze, synthesize and present information, and put information into appropriate contexts.
- ❖ Apply appropriate theories and methods to the collection, analysis and interpretation of information.
- ❖ Adapt and innovate as the world of information changes.
- ❖ Apply knowledge through professional and academic projects.

Expectations and roles

For any class to work, instructors and students must have a shared understanding of goals, expectations and roles. Here's what you can expect from me:

- ❖ To provide resources and common areas of study for all students, and an online structure that promotes learning and builds community.
- ❖ To provide feedback on ideas, assignments and projects.
- ❖ To help troubleshoot problems and point students to appropriate resources.
- ❖ To help students learn.

Here's what I expect of you:

- ❖ To set realistic learning goals for the course and to pursue those goals throughout the course.
- ❖ To complete all the required work, to participate thoughtfully in online discussions and to post comments in a timely manner.
- ❖ To keep an open mind and to share resources and ideas that help everyone in the class learn about communication and technology in a rapidly changing society.

Communication (or, how to reach me)

I will do my best to answer your questions promptly, but please don't expect an immediate response. Give me up to 24 hours to respond, though I will respond much sooner whenever possible. Here are some general guidelines for communicating with me:

Slack: Use this for general questions about the class, and for class discussions. Slack also has a private chat function, and I will monitor Slack most of the day and into the evening. You can draw my attention to general posts by including my handle: @dbward.

Email: If you need to contact me directly, feel free to do so at dbward@ku.edu. I will reply within 24 hours.

Phone: Feel free to call me at my office during the day. I rarely check my voicemail when I'm away from the office, so if you need me immediately or can't get to me any other way, text me at 785-760-6220.

Days and times you can expect a response: You will be most likely to get a quick response on a weekday. The worst time to try to reach me is Saturday. I'll plan to monitor Slack and email on most Sunday afternoons.

I'm a morning person, so I'm more likely to check messages at 7 a.m. than 7 p.m. By 9 p.m., I'm a zombie. (Go ahead and snicker; my children do.)

Dates I will not be available: I will be available only sporadically on Aug. 24-26, so expect delays in responses if you try to reach me then.

Grades

I provide more detail about grading below, but these are the four areas on which I will base final grades:

Discussion: 50%

Individual project: 30%

Learning journal: 10%

Annotated resources: 10%

Grading expectations: Give me up to a week for grading on most assignments, though I will gladly provide quick feedback whenever I can. I have created grading rubrics for every area of the class, so make sure to look through those and ask about anything that isn't clear.

Required materials

We will not have a textbook for this class. Rather, I'll provide readings, podcasts, videos and other materials on Blackboard. To make the class run smoothly, you will need a few resources:

Blackboard. This will be the repository of most course materials, including the syllabus, grade contract, and general class instructions. The **Weekly assignments** folder on Blackboard has separate folders for each week of the class. That's where you will find all assignments, readings, podcasts, videos, and other material you will need to complete your work for the week. You will also find links for help and additional information on the panel on the left side of the page in Blackboard. These include help

files for Blackboard, a link to KU Libraries, and a link to Slack, where you can post general questions.

OneNote. You will use OneNote for your learning journal and other individual assignments. That's where you will post your introduction (and find profiles of others in the class), post your reviews of digital tools, and find lists of helpful resources from instructors and librarians. OneNote is connected to Blackboard, but I strongly recommend that you download the desktop version of the program through Office 365. You have free access to Office 365 through a KU site called myCommunity.

Slack. Slack is an online communication tool that is popular among many digital companies (one of the reasons I chose it). We will use it as the primary means of class communication, including announcements, class discussions, and general questions. It has excellent apps for desktop and mobile devices. I've found Slack very effective at creating a sense of community (one of my goals for this class), and it works best when you monitor it frequently and share ideas and new resources you find. I also use some bots with Slack. Bots are programs intended to help with routine tasks. Expect occasional check-ins from a bot called Howdy, which will ask for responses from you. Another bot, Paperbot, gathers links people post to Slack and sends them to you in an email. (You will have to opt in for that.) Yet another, Grasp, evaluates links people post and adds a related article each day. If you find other bots you'd like to try, let me know.

Finally, An open mind and a willingness to think broadly about media, communication, technology, innovation, and the future.

Assignments, evaluation and grading

You will be graded on completion of four types of assignments: discussions, written assignments, an individual learning journal and a final project. I've created rubrics for each of those areas. They usually include only three options: unsatisfactory, satisfactory and excellent. "Satisfactory" doesn't mean so-so. It means that you have achieved at least the minimum expectations for the assignments. This is a graduate class, so those expectations are high. In most cases, you will be able to resubmit unsatisfactory work for reconsideration. That won't be possible with discussions and with the project you turn in on the last day of class, though.

See Blackboard for a detailed list of readings, assignments and deadlines. Please pay attention to the weekly email messages I send and to the Blackboard assignments. We'll stick to the Blackboard schedule as much as possible, but I reserve the right to make changes to fit the needs of the class. I will announce any changes in the general channel on slack.

Discussions (50% of final grade)

All discussions will take place on Slack. I'll provide topics and readings on Blackboard, but feel free to suggest readings for various topics and discussions. I also encourage you to cite and link to additional resources you know about or find. I will also give you two broad discussion questions each week.

Discussions should generally take this format:

❖ **Roles**. Students will assume various roles during each discussion. Groups are welcome to create additional roles, but each group should contain these:
  ➢ *Discussion leader*. This is just what it sounds like. This person should start the discussion and make sure it stays on track.
  ➢ *Devil's advocate*. This person should raise contradictory points of view and challenge the conventional thinking. That doesn't mean the devil's advocate should trash others' ideas; rather, that person should raise valid concerns and bring in contradictory points of view and back up those assertions with evidence wherever possible.
  ➢ *Synthesizer*. This person will look at the big picture and work at tying the topic to broader ideas and to previous discussions. Everyone should work at this, of course, but one person should always be bringing in previous material and other ideas that provide a broader perspective.
  ➢ *Reporter*. This person will participate in the discussion but at the end will summarize it and post a synopsis on OneNote. The reporter also makes a list of outside resources that are brought up in the discussions.

❖ **Weekly reports**. The designated reporter will provide a synopsis of the discussions for the entire class. Those should be posted on OneNote within a couple of days after the discussions close.
❖ **Deadlines**. New discussions will begin on Mondays. Students should post at least once by Wednesday and then at least two more times by Sunday night. That's a minimum. This should be a discussion, not just a dump of notes. Feel free to share you general thoughts in the first post, but work at elaborating on, extending and challenging others' posts, just as you would in a physical classroom.

The idea in identifying specific roles is to improve the discussions and to make sure that topics are covered thoroughly. Each of you has different jobs, perspectives and experience, and you should bring those perspectives to each discussion. I'll monitor the discussions and weigh in, as well.

Please be respectful. As with all live and online discussion, please be considerate of others. Don't berate others' thoughts or comments. We come from many different background and hold many different views. That diversity enriches discussions and helps us extend our understanding of the world. By all means, challenge other's assumptions, opinions and interpretations, but do so in a collegial manner. Great ideas often evolve from disagreement, but no one is served by put-downs and snarky

commentary. We all have different levels of knowledge depending on the topic, so be helpful. Also keep in mind that written comments can come across in unintended ways. Again, be considerate.

This policy from a site called The Conversation is an excellent guide to interacting online:

https://theconversation.com/us/community-standards

I want our conversations to be free-flowing, and I don't anticipate any problems. I reserve the right to take down comments that use vulgar language, that are hurtful or show disrespect to others, or that veer wildly off-topic. I've created a separate rubric for evaluating discussion posts. You will find it in the Syllabus folder.

Learning journal (10% of final grade)

A learning journal is a place for you to reflect on ideas, goals, frustrations and anything else related to learning. What stuck out in the readings or discussions? What do you want to follow up on or learn more about? What new connections have you made in course materials? How might you apply new ideas to your job?

The entries don't have to be long, but you should post at least once a week. See the rubric for additional guidelines on grading.

First entry. In the first entry, you should create learning goals. Learning goals are crucial to your growth as a student and a professional, and are intended to help you learn independently. Your learning goals should contain a reflection on why you are taking the course and what you hope to gain from it. Here's a format you can follow to help you get started. This isn't a required format. Rather, it's intended to give you a sense of some things that lead to good learning goals.

- ❖ *Start with your interests.* What facets of marketing communication and technology are you most interested in? What would you like to learn more about?
- ❖ *Then discuss your strengths and weaknesses in relation to those goals.* What areas are you most comfortable with? What areas do you need work in and why?
- ❖ *Then consider what you would like to learn from this class.* How might this class help you bolster your strengths and shore up your weaknesses? What class topics are you most interested in? What topics would you like to pursue beyond those listed?
- ❖ *Then create a rough plan.* How will achieve your learning goals? How will your individual project fit into that? How will you prepare yourself to learn?

Final entry. Your final entry should be a self-evaluation for the semester. It should list the grade you contracted to receive and a chart demonstrating that you have satisfactorily completed all of the required elements. It should then provide a reflection on your work in the class. Here's a general format:

- ❖ Restate your learning goals and explain why you chose those goals.

❖ Explain how you worked toward those goals. Where have you succeeded? For instance, have you noticed any changes in the way you think about information, research, media, digital tools or other things we've talked about?
❖ Where could you have done better, and what do you need to keep in mind in future courses in the program?
❖ What aspects of the class have been most helpful in your learning and which could be improved?

Individual project proposal (30% of final grade)

The individual project will allow you to explore an area of digital content strategy that interests you. The primary goal is for you to demonstrate understanding of the research process by reading widely, drawing on appropriate sources, focusing a question, and making a strong argument for pursuing that question. Your project won't be a complete research project but rather the beginnings of that project. It should include an introduction, a review of literature, a clearly defined question, and a plan that explains the next steps you need to take to answer that question.

The research process is messy. Rarely do good researchers begin a project with a fully formed and focused question. Rather, they start with general questions, read widely, hone their thinking and their direction, identify a niche, and continue to focus their question. That's the process you will follow for this project, which you will complete in steps: I'll provide a separate handout with more details, but here's the broad outline, along with deadlines:

❖ **Aug. 28**: In your learning journal, identify an area you would like to explore, along with some general questions you have about that topic. Share your ideas with classmates that week and get feedback.
❖ **Aug. 29-Sept. 11**: Read widely in popular media, trade publications and academic literature, and create a bibliography. Explain your progress at least once a week in your learning journal.
❖ **Sept. 11**: Post an introduction and bibliography for your proposal in the collaboration area in OneNote. It should explain the problem, provide some brief context (who else is studying this question or problem, how are they doing that, and what have they found), and a revised question or question for your project.
❖ **Oct. 3**: Literature review due, along with a revised introduction. Post this in the collaboration area of OneNote. We will workshop those papers among class members that week.
❖ **Oct. 14**: Submit final paper with an introduction, review of literature, and an outline of next steps for exploring this question.

Reviews of helpful sites and tools (10% of final grade)

This will involve two reviews. Preferably, one will be an informational website and another a digital tool, but I will accept two from either area.

This assignment has two goals: to help you explore new resources and tools, and to create an informational resource for the class. I will provide lists of tools and websites

you might explore, but I want all of you to add to that list. These include tools for monitoring social media, for analyzing and visualizing information, and for keeping up with new ideas and technology.

Once you have chosen a site or tool, you should experiment with it, finding the strengths and weaknesses, and then write a review. These reviews should include a URL, two or three paragraphs describing what the site or tool is and what it and how it might be used. You should post these in the collaboration area in OneNote. I've provided an example in OneNote, reviewing the site of the Nielsen Norman Group.

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The fine print
Academic Misconduct: We will strictly follow the code of Academic Misconduct detailed in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. University policies covering academic misconduct are spelled out in the current Student Handbook.

Policy on Plagiarism and Fabrication/Falsification: The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not tolerate plagiarism, fabrication of evidence and falsification of evidence.

Penalties for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification can include a failing grade for this course and expulsion from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the teachers of this course.

The following definitions are from Article II, Section 6, of the University Senate Rules and Regulations, revised FY98.

Plagiarism
Knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the information or ideas are common knowledge.

Fabrication and Falsification
Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

Academic accommodations
The Office of Disability Resources, 22 Strong Hall, 785-864-2620 (v/tty), coordinates accommodations and services for KU students with disabilities. If you have a disability for which you may request accommodation in KU classes and have not contacted the Office of Disability Resources, please do so as soon as possible. Please also contact your instructors privately about your work in this course.

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