

Information Behaviour

INF2332 ■ Winter 2014 ■ Thursday, 9:30-12:00 ■ Dr. Jenna Hartel

COURSE OVERVIEW

Information behaviour is the currently preferred (but contested) term used to describe the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular the ways in which people seek and utilize information. An understanding of information behaviour is central to work in the information professions and knowledge-based industries. For more than 75 years information behaviour research has been conducted in the field of library and information science and forms a rich, central research tradition that has much to offer professional practice and information provision in all kinds of settings. For Winter 2014, INF2332 takes advanced graduate students *deep* into a small set of important books and ideas about information behaviour. Along the way, emphasis will be placed upon methodological aspects of information behaviour research, that is, *how* it is conducted. What is more, the learning experience in the course will be driven by two original research projects. Students will engage in a collaborative visual study about the nature of information in various disciplines and conduct information horizon interviews on a population of their choice. Since substantial time will *not* be spent “getting up to speed” on foundational concepts, prior exposure to information behaviour scholarship (through INF1310 or INF2332) is recommended; alternatively, optional introductory readings will be provided. INF2332 is ideal for precocious learners who harbor a personal research question about information behaviour and/or those who wish to advance a concatenated research career. Of note, INF2332 will be emergent and participant-directed, unfolding in synch with student interests and progress, hence the schedule that follows (on page 3) is subject to change.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completing the course participants will gain:

- An awareness of the contribution of information behaviour research to library and information science and its professional realms.
- Familiarity with the central concepts of information behaviour, namely: information practice, information need, information seeking, information searching, browsing, information encountering, information use, and so on.
- Rudimentary knowledge of seminal models of information behaviour.
- A sensitivity to the diversity and complexity of information behaviour within various situations, social worlds, and contexts.
- Advanced understanding of the important theoretical and methodological contributions by Anders Hektor, Elfreda Chatman, Diane Sonnenwald, and Carol Kuhlthau, and an inkling of their implications for practice.
- Experience with the draw-and-write technique and the iSquare protocol to study information.
- An ability to design and conduct an information horizon interview and to write-up the findings.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

This is an advanced seminar aimed at theoretical, methodological, conceptual, and personal discovery. Learning in the course will be achieved through readings, in-class discussion, in-class activities, written assignments, original research projects, and the occasional lecture by the instructor.

INSTRUCTOR OFFICE HOURS & CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. Jenna Hartel

Contact: jenna.hartel@utoronto.ca

Office hours: Wednesday, 2:00-3:00 and by appointment at Bissell 645 2:00-3:00 [No office hour on Wednesday, March 5]

The best way to contact the instructor is via email; typically, responses will be sent within 48 hours. Telephone is not a recommended means of communication. To meet with the instructor during office hours it is advisable to schedule an appointment by email; drop-in meetings during office hours are on a first-come first-served basis and limited to 10 minutes if others are waiting.

COURSE PROTOCOLS

Most sessions will last 2.5 hours and include a short break. Class will begin at 9:30, *sharp* (please arrive at 9:20 to get settled and gather handouts). Assigned readings should be read *in advance* of class. Phones should be silenced during class time. *Computers may be used for note-taking, but Internet surfing, email, and other forms of multi-tasking while the instructor is speaking will be considered impolite and inappropriate.*

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONSIDERATION

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the instructor or the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The essence of academic life revolves around respect not only for the ideas of others, but also their rights to those ideas and their promulgation. It is therefore essential that all of us engaged in the life of the mind take the utmost care that the ideas and expressions of ideas of other people always be appropriately handled, and, where necessary, cited. For writing assignments, when ideas or materials of others are used, they must be cited. In any situation, if you have a question, please feel free to ask. Such attention to ideas and acknowledgement of their sources is central not only to academic life, but life in general. Please acquaint yourself with U of T's [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).

WEBSITE ON BLACKBOARD

A course website will be maintained on Blackboard and include the syllabus, selected readings in PDF, handouts, lecture slides, and a discussion board (as needed). Blackboard will also be used to send email announcements, post grades, and calculate final grades.

REQUIRED TEXTS

This course will be centered on important monographs of information behaviour. These items will be kept on reserve at the Inforum, may be found as e-books online, or can be purchased (recommended) new or used from online or local retailers.

Hektor, A. (2001). *What's the use? Internet and information behaviour in everyday life*. Linköping: Linköping University. [[free e-book](#)]

Chatman, E. (1992). *The information world of retired women*. New York: Greenwood Press. [Inforum reserve]

Kuhlthau, C. C. (2004). *Seeking meaning: A process approach to library and information services* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited. [Inforum reserve]

INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS

Substantial time will *not* be spent introducing foundational concepts of information behaviour. For rapid acclimation to the topic, read the two items below prior to Session 1.

Bates, M. J. (2010). Information behaviour. In M. J. Bates, & M. N. Maack (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences* (3rd ed., pp. 2381-2391.). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. [Blackboard]

Case, D.O. (2007). Information behaviour: An Introduction. In *Looking for information: A Survey of research on information seeking, needs, and behaviour* (2nd ed., pp. 3-35). London: Elsevier. [Inforum reserve and Blackboard]

Also, I have produced an online [Reading Guide to Information Behaviour](#) that guides newcomers into the information behaviour literature. Peruse this resource prior to Session 1. You will find many helpful resources in the *Reading Guide* that can be used for course assignments.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule for INF2332 will be emergent and participant-directed; it will be synchronized to student interest and progress, and students will play a significant role in directing the tempo, class discussions, and class activities. Therefore, the topics and assigned readings listed below are subject to change.

| SESSION & DATE | TOPICS | READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS | LEADER(S) |
|----------------|--|---|----------------------------|
| ❶ January 9 | Overview of the course The information behaviour/practice debate | Savolainen (2007) Wilson & Savolainen (2009) | Jenna |
| ❷ January 16 | <i>What's the Use?</i> iSquare research project launch | Hektor (2001), Ch. 1 – 3 Hartel (in press) Bates (2007) | Will Portia |
| ❸ January 23 | <i>What's the Use?</i> (cont'd) iSquare project working session | Hektor (2001), Ch. 4 – 7 Hektor (2001), Ch. 8 – 9 (optional) <i>Glossary assignment due</i> | Caleb Catherine |
| ❹ January 30 | <i>The Information World of Retired Women</i> iSquare project working session | Chatman (1992) | Nicole Sarah Melissa |
| ❺ February 6 | <i>Synthesizing Chatman</i> iSquare project working session | Chatman (1996) Chatman (1999) Savolainen (2009) | Jennifer Lauren |
| ❻ February 13 | The information horizon interview Information horizon research project launch | Sonnenwald & Iivonen (1999) Sonnenwald et al. (2001) Savolainen (2008) | Sarah Quenby |
| ☺ February 20 | Reading Week (class does not meet) | | |
| ❼ February 27 | The information horizon interview (cont'd) Information horizon research project working session | Huvila (2009) Savolainen & Kari (2004) <i>iSquare assignment due</i> | Patrick Stephanie |
| ❽ March 6 | Information behaviour brouhaha (research showcase) <i>Professor Hartel away at the iConference, Berlin.</i> | tbd | --- |
| ❾ March 13 | <i>Seeking Meaning</i> Information horizon research project working session | Kuhlthau (2004) Ch. 1-5 Wilson (2004) | Ashley Sarah-Anne |
| ❿ March 20 | <i>Seeking Meaning</i> (cont'd) | Kuhlthau (2004) Ch. 6-8, 11 | Courtenay Polina |
| ⓫ March 27 | Wrap up and student presentations | <i>Presentation due</i> | --- |
| ⓬ April 3 | Wrap up and student presentations | <i>Presentation due</i> <i>Information horizon assignment due</i> | --- |

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNED READINGS

- Bates, M. J. (2005). An introduction to theories, metatheories, and models. In K. E. Fisher, S. Erdelez, & L. McKechnie (Eds.), *Theories of information behaviour* (pp. 1-24). Medford, NJ: Information Today. [Blackboard]
- Bates, M. J. (2007). Defining the information disciplines in encyclopedia development. *Information Research*, 12(4). [\[link\]](#)
- Chatman, E. (1996.). The Impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 47(3), 193–206. [\[link\]](#)
- Chatman, E. (1999). A theory of life in the round. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 50(3), 207–217. [\[link\]](#)
- Hartel, J. (in press). An Arts-informed study of information using the draw-and-write technique. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*. [Blackboard]
- Huvila, I. (2009). Analytical information horizon maps. *Library & Information Science Research*, 31(1), 18-28. [\[link\]](#)
- Savolainen, R. & Kari, J. (2004). Placing the Internet in information source horizons. A study of information seeking by Internet users in the context of self-development. *Library & Information Science Research*, 26(4), 415-433. [\[link\]](#)
- Savolainen, R. (2007). Information behaviour and information practice: Reviewing the “umbrella concepts” of information-seeking studies. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy Information* 77(2), 109-132. [\[link\]](#)
- Savolainen, R. (2008). Conceptualizing everyday information practices. In *Everyday Information practices: A social phenomenological approach* (pp. 37-75). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. [Inforum reserve]
- Savolainen, R. (2009). Small world and information grounds as contexts of information seeking and sharing. *Library & Information Science Research*, 31(1), 38-45. [\[link\]](#)
- Sonnenwald, D. H. & Iivonen, M. (1999). An integrated human information behaviour research framework for information studies. *Library and Information Science Research*, 21(4), 429-457. [\[link\]](#)
- Sonnenwald, D. H., Wildemuth, B. M., & Harmon, G. L. (2001). A research method using the concept of information horizons: An example from a study of lower socio-economic students’ information seeking behaviour. *The New review of information behaviour research*, 2, 65-86. [Blackboard]
- Wilson, T. & Savolainen, R. (2009). The behaviour/practice debate: a discussion prompted by Tom Wilson's review of Reijo Savolainen's *Everyday information practices: a social phenomenological perspective*. *Information Research*, 14(2). [\[link\]](#)
- Wilson, T.D. (2004) Review of *Seeking meaning: a process approach to library and information services* (2nd. ed.). *Information Research*, 9(3). [\[link\]](#)

ASSIGNMENTS

| ASSIGNMENT | DESCRIPTION | VALUE | DUE |
|---|---|-------------|------------|
| 1 Information Behaviour Glossary | Create your own working definitions for 8 terms associated with information behaviour. | 20% | Session 3 |
| 2 iSquare Research & Report | Participate in collaborative, original iSquare research using the draw-and-write technique; write-up your findings in a 2,000 word paper. | 30% | Session 7 |
| 3 Information Horizon Interview Research & Report | Design and implement original information behaviour research utilizing the information horizon interview; write-up your findings in a 2,000 word paper. | 30% | Session 12 |
| 4 Class Participation | Contribute to discussions; lead discussions, present during Session 11 & 12. | 20% | throughout |
| Total | | 100% | |

COMMENTS ON GRADING

Evaluation of student work will conform to guidelines found in the [Faculty of Information Guidelines to Grade Interpretation](#). According to this source: A+ is truly exceptional; A is a high level of excellence; A- is excellent; B+ is very good; B is good; and B- is adequate.

① Information Behaviour Glossary

There are many key terms in the information behaviour research area and all are contested. These terms originate in a variety of metatheoretical perspectives (e. g. cognitivism, social constructionism, etc.) and debates (such as the behaviour-practice debate and the debate concerning the subjective-objective nature of information). The goal of this assignment is to examine several key terms, reflect upon their theoretical origins, and then come to your own understanding and working definitions. Follow the instructions below.

1. Select 6 terms from the list; the term "information" is mandatory.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| browsing | information practice |
| domain | information resource |
| everyday life information seeking | information searching |
| information | information seeking |
| information activity | information system |
| information behaviour | information use |
| information encountering | personal information management |
| information experience | problem |
| information ground | relevance |
| information horizon | user |
| information need | |

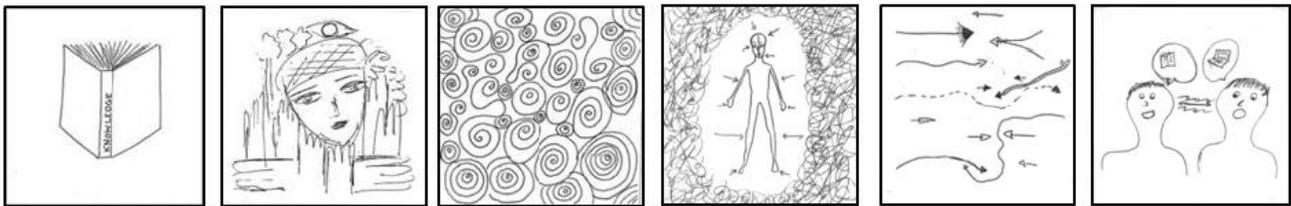
2. Also select two terms from the English language that you think are relevant to this course but are not included above. This element of the assignment is an opportunity for you to use your imagination and contribute something new to the discourse of information behaviour. Overall, you will define 8 terms for the assignment.
3. Generate working definitions for each term. Each definition should be 1-3 sentences long and include an illustrative sentence. Draw upon the introductory materials listed in this syllabus and any other resources you find useful. You may borrow from and be inspired by existing definitions but do not copy anything verbatim. You can use images or models when appropriate to enhance the definition. Make the definitions succinct and non-technical; ideally a friend or parent outside of our iSchool should be able to understand the terms. You are *not* expected to produce an authoritative definition based upon a thorough literature review; rather, *the goal is to think independently and creatively about the key terms so that they make sense to you.*
4. As you get underway in the assignment, you may realize that it helps to commit to a metatheoretical perspective which will influence your definitions. [For a primer on metatheory, see Bates (2005), posted on Blackboard.] You may also find that some of the terms "hang together" whereas others are in conflict with each other. Write an introduction of 200 words that comments on one or more of these issues: the metatheoretical perspective behind your definitions; the logic of your choice of terms; and/or the strategy you used to formulate the definitions.
5. The assignment is to be submitted on paper at Session 3 with an introduction and the 8 definitions.

The evaluation criteria for the assignment will include: the depth and sophistication of your thinking; the extent of originality and creativity applied; the theoretical consistency between the introduction and definitions.

📍 iSquare Research & Report

This assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct potentially important original research on the nature of information. INF2332 students will together implement an empirical, visual research project that asks: *How do graduate students in different academic disciplines visually render the concept of information?* Put another way: *Do the epistemological, cultural, historical, and social forces within academic disciplines influence student conceptions of information?* [To engage "academic disciplines" systematically, we will adopt the framework presented as Figure 1. in Bates (2007).]

The research will replicate and then extend a study done by the instructor in 2011 and utilize the *draw-and-write technique*; it entails asking people to respond to the question "What is information?" by drawing on a 4" by 4" piece of paper, coined an "iSquare" (sample iSquares from the 2011 data set are shown below). The study and associated assignment will be addressed in segments of class time during the first half of the semester and will be done collaboratively. Throughout, we will be helped by a Research Assistant, doctoral student Christie Oh, who conducted the same exercise within a doctoral seminar during Fall 2013.



The project requires interaction with human subjects and has been approved by the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics. Therefore, you must follow the protocols of ethical research in the [Guidelines and Practices Manual for Research Involving Human Subjects](#), which will be reviewed in class.

A general set of steps for the assignment are listed below.

1. As background, read the paper by Hartel "An Arts-Informed Study of Information Using the Draw-and-Write Technique." Reflect upon the design of Hartel's study; note that the sample was limited to students at the iSchool who are in the fields of information studies and museum studies.
2. Consider a new research question: *How do graduate students in other academic disciplines render the concept of information?* Put another way: *Do the epistemological, cultural, historical, and social forces within academic disciplines influence student conceptions of information?* This question attempts to explore social constructionist, collectivist, or domain analytic notions of information. Our research design will gather iSquares from 5-6 different disciplines at the University of Toronto, and seek to identify patterns and distinctions among them.
3. With your assigned team of 2-3 peers, practice the data gathering protocol during the class working session. Your team will be scheduled to collect iSquares from one graduate course at the University of Toronto. The instructor and Research Assistant will coordinate these appointments. Implement the data gathering for your target population at the specified time, date, and location.
4. Contribute to collaborative data management by recording and scanning the iSquares into the shared online repository (technical details forthcoming). Altogether, our class will collect an estimated 150-200 new iSquares from 5-6 different academic disciplines at the University of Toronto.
5. Independently, you will analyze the data (iSquares), aiming to answer the original research questions stated in #2, above. You may narrow the questions or examine only a portion of the iSquares, if desired (e. g. compare only two disciplines). Focus analytical attention on the drawings, not the text on the back side. Analytical strategies such as grounded theory and thematic analysis will be discussed and practiced in class.

6. Write up findings into a 2,000 word report with these sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Research Method, Findings, Discussion/Implications, Methodological Reflections and Conclusion. It is likely you will include iSquare images in your paper. Follow APA guidelines for format, content, and referencing.

The evaluation criteria for the assignment will include: your contribution to the collaboration from start to finish; the appropriateness of your analysis technique; the sophistication and effectiveness of your thinking, writing, and presentation throughout the final report.

📍 Information Horizon Interview Research & Report

Diane Sonnenwald's information horizon interview is an important methodological advance in information behaviour research. It allows the researcher to capture a visual conception of human information behaviour with a particular setting, population, or problem. The technique has been taken up by several scholars and produced a small literature of new insights. The goal of this assignment is for you to design and conduct an original exploratory study utilizing Sonnenwald's approach.

The project requires interaction with human subjects and has been approved by the University of Toronto's Office of Research Ethics. Therefore, you must follow the protocols of ethical research in the *Guidelines and Practices Manual for Research Involving Human Subjects*, which will be reviewed in class.

A general set of steps for the assignment are listed below.

1. As background, read the methodological statement on the method by Sonnenwald et al. (2001) as well as the precedents and extensions (assigned in Sessions 6 & 7).
2. Select an information behaviour setting, population, or problem that can be explored using the information horizon interview method. The crux of your inquiry is to determine the resources and techniques people use when seeking information. An example study may be, "How do iSchool students engage new technological skills, such as making a video?" Or, "What do people do to learn a new hobby, like knitting?" Or, "What are the key steps of a job search outside one's career?" Or, "How does a family respond (informationally) to the diagnosis of an illness?" Or, "What information plays a role in planning a wedding?" For these research questions, and others, it is important to select a relatively precise question and an accessible population within the GTA. Write up your preliminary idea(s) and bring them to Session 7 to share with the instructor and peers.
3. In Session 7, practice the information horizon interview and refine your technique. Soon thereafter, conduct 2-3 information horizon interviews between Sessions 7-10. The interviews must occur face-to-face and follow the appropriate procedures to acquire verbal consent. Tape record and transcribe the interviews.
4. Independently, you will analyze the data (horizon drawings and interview transcripts). Your analysis technique may follow any of the precedent studies. Aim to answer your original research question(s). Because of the compressed timing for this project and its exploratory spirit the analysis process does *not* have to be overly formal.
5. Write up your findings into a final 2,000 word report with these sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Research Method, Findings, Discussion/Implication, Methodological Reflections, and Conclusion. It is likely you will include information horizon diagrams in your paper. Follow APA guidelines for format, content, and referencing.

The evaluation criteria for the assignment will include: the logic of the research design; successful adaptation and implementation of the information horizon interview method; the sophistication and effectiveness of your thinking, writing, and presentation in the final report.

④ Class Participation

This is largely a discussion seminar. It is expected that everyone will actively participate in class discussions; the class will only be successful if everyone takes part in the learning. Participation is not the same as showing up for class. Participations means that you engage in the material and contribute to the class' collective work in a constructive and critical way.

Your participation will be evaluated according to two principles: *quantity* and *quality*. Quantity addresses how often you engage in discussions, how often you start a discussion, how often you comment on other people's discussion contributions, etc. It is important to contribute often - but it is equally important that you don't dominate or take over the discussions. Quality is a matter of whether you offer insights that bring discussions forward, whether you ask questions that help the class think constructively about the issues, whether you offer insights when the discussion is stuck or off on a tangent, etc. The guidelines below, borrowed from Haverford College, outline my expectations for class participation and reflect the grading criteria that will be applied:

Outstanding Contributor [A+]: Contributions in class are frequent and reflect exceptional preparation in nearly every class. Consistently volunteers answers and asks questions that assist the learning of the class as a whole. Class activities are always approached with enthusiasm and diligence. Attends every class session. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of the course as a whole would be diminished significantly.

Good Contributor [A-]: Contributions in class are frequent and reflect thorough preparation in nearly every class. Often volunteers answers to questions. Frequently asks questions that assist the learning of the class as a whole. Class activities are almost always approached with seriousness and diligence. Attends nearly every class session. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of the course as a whole would be diminished.

Adequate Contributor [B]: Contributions in class are infrequent but reflect adequate preparation. Rarely volunteers answers to questions. Infrequently asks questions, but they are appropriate and helpful to class. Class activities are usually approached with diligence. Absent from a few class sessions. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would not be changed.

Non-Participant [B-]: This person participates not at all in class. Absenteeism is a problem. Hence, there is not an adequate basis for evaluation. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would not be changed.

An element of the participation grade is to lead the discussion for one week. Lead roles will be assigned by the instructor and appear in the course schedule. You can assume that everyone in the class has read the materials so don't spend too much on presentations (a few minutes should be enough). Focus on the key elements and what makes the paper/chapter unique. The purpose of discussion is to expand the class' understanding of the readings. How you do that is up to you. The goal is to get the class to critically discuss the reading (don't merely summarize the reading). Your discussion leads will be evaluated on your success in getting the class engaged in a lively discussion about the topic and readings.

Another element of the participation grade is a 15 minute, informal presentation to occur in Session 11 and 12. You are to select your most important learning from the semester and share it with the group. You may focus on any course topic, reading, or assignment. Powerpoint is not required. Keep in mind that the objective of the presentation is to help the entire class *digest* and *synthesize* course materials and ideas; please do not introduce wholly new content from outside the course into the presentation.