Course Description

Information Studies may be unique among academic disciplines. Because the phenomenon of information itself is so complex – both its manifestations, and the social, cultural, technological and institutional formations associated with it – Information Studies today is the product of multiple epistemic and intellectual traditions, each with different professional roots and alliances, different assumptions about the nature of reality and of knowledge, different objects of study, and different methods for inquiry and research. In this seminar, students are introduced to the main philosophical traditions, or epistemes, of research and scholarship that currently inform inquiry in Information Studies.

Objectives

As a result of instruction in this course, students will be able to:

a) Define epistemology and describe its role in information studies research and scholarship

b) Compare and contrast the ontological and epistemological foundations of the humanities, the sciences, and engineering/systems design, and their respective influences on information studies

c) Discuss information as a concept and an object of study

d) Outline the main philosophical and theoretical debates that have influenced the disciplinary evolution of library and information science towards information studies

e) Describe and critique emerging philosophical developments in information studies, including social epistemology and philosophy of information

Requirements

Readings/Discussions. The course is taught in seminar form. Students are expected to make cogent and prepared contributions to class discussions. Students are expected to come to class having read the materials assigned for each class meeting, as listed below under "Weekly Topics and Readings." Please note that there are required readings for the first class meeting on October 2.
Required Readings. The required readings are listed below under “Weekly Topics and Readings” and will be available via the course website for download, or through the UCLA Libraries. Additional “Recommended” readings may be posted on the website.

Students are also encouraged to purchase their own copies of two books that are excerpted for the course:

Assignments. Students will be required to write a two-part term paper (annotated bibliography and literature review) based on the work of a prominent information studies scholar. Details and due dates will be available on the course website and discussed in class. Students are required to choose and follow a standard stylebook for doctoral-level research papers (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago Manual of Style, IEEE) to prepare their assignments.

**Course Policies**

Grading Formula. Grading for the course is based on the following formula: 50% for the quality of the student's preparation for, and participation in, the seminar; 20% for the annotated bibliography and 30% for the literature review (50% total for the term paper assignment).

Students with Disabilities. Students with a documented disability who wish to discuss academic accommodations should contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at (310) 825-1501. They should also notify the instructor about any disability issues at the start of the quarter so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged and coordinated with the OSD well in advance of course assignments and due dates.

Website Policy. The course website is password-protected and intended for the exclusive instructional use of students enrolled in IS 291A, the instructor, and guests as permitted by the instructor. Students should not give access to the site or course materials to others without the express permission of the instructor.

**Weekly Topics and Readings**

**October 2**

Introduction: Epistemes in Research and Scholarship


Recommended:

October 9  
**Naturalist Epistemes: The Sciences and Engineering/Systems**

- Chapter 1, Some Historical Background: Inductivism, Russell and the Cambridge School, the Vienna Circle and Popper, pp. 3-25.


**Recommended:**


October 16  
**The Interpretive Turn:**  
Phenomenological, Hermeneutic, Constructivist Approaches

- German philosophical hermeneutics: Phenomenology and existentialism, pp. 74-84.
- Continental philosophical hermeneutics post war, pp. 85-118.

- Chapter 5, Interpretation in library and information studies, pp. 85-96.
- Chapter 6, Objections to the interpretive position, pp. 97-120.

Recommended:


October 23  

**Social Epistemology and Information Studies**


Recommended:


October 30  

**Humanist Epistemes / Historical Studies**


Introduction, pp. 1-8  
Chapter 1, “Cinderella gets her prince? The development of social history,” pp. 9-32.

**Recommended:**


**November 6**

**NO CLASS MEETING / Prof. Lievrouw at ASIST**

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE online by midnight**

**November 13**

**Introduction to Critical Theory**


- Part III: Critical theory, pp. 175-221.


- Chapter 2, Sketching the lineage: The critical method and the idealist tradition, pp. 11-38.


- Chapter 1, The conflict tradition, pp. 47-118.

**Recommended:**


- Introduction, pp. 1-12.
- Rethinking critical theory, pp. 13-54.


**November 20**

**Critical Theory in Information Studies**


- Introduction, pp. 1-6.
- Chapter 5, Heidegger and Benjamin: The metaphysics and fetish of information, pp. 91-113.
- Chapter 6, Conclusion: ‘Information’ and the role of critical theory, pp. 114-120.


November 27  Theories and Methods


December 4  Crisis or Pluralism?


   Chapter 5, “In search of integrity,” pp. 77-105.


EXAM WEEK: Final Term Papers due by midnight, December 11