

Syllabus

I • Coordinates

1. **Course:** INF1005: Information Workshop I: Section 101
 - a. Title: Platforms for Annotation, Commentary, and Collaborative Editing
 - b. Term: Winter 2017
2. **Coordinates**
 - a. Time: Monday, 9:00 a.m. — 12:00 noon
 - b. Dates: January 9 — February 13, 2017 (6 classes)
 - c. Place: BL417 (iSchool Room 417, Bissell Bldg., 140 St George Street St.)
3. **Instructor:** Brian Cantwell Smith
 - a. E-mail: brian.cantwell.smith@utoronto.ca
 - b. Office: BL633
 - c. Office hours: Thursday, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

II • Course Description and Objectives

The internet has opened up vast new possibilities for collaborative commenting, editing, annotation, and writing of documents. At present, such practices employ a potpourri of systems—from Microsoft Office’s “track changes,” to facilities for adding comments and copy-editing marks to PDF documents, to shared Google Docs, to unstructured notes sent via email. Attempts are being made to systematize some parts of these activities, including the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)’s Open Annotation Model, WordPress’ CommentPress facility for structured commentary, and the increasing use of GitHub (a system originally developed to provide version control and code management for distributed software development, but now used as well for collaborative writing and other arts and humanities projects).

This workshop will be a hands-on exploration and assessment of available tools for collaborative annotation, commenting, and editing, and comparison of those tools with age-old annotation and commenting practices from the era of pen and print.

Theoretical issues of document identity and intertextual reference will be used to develop metrics and conceptual models in terms of which to map currently available tools, identify respective strengths and weaknesses, and point towards opportunities for future development. Student projects will involve exploring current options, documenting their ability to support commentary and annotation of increasing complexity, and formulating recommendations for their improvement.

A. Course objectives

1. **Articulate** the conceptual structure of annotation, commenting, and editing (ACE), as practiced in both print and online practices.

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many indigenous people. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

2. **Comprehend** traditional (print-based) ACE practices
3. **Investigate** the powers, merits, and demerits of contemporary digital annotation systems and practices (e.g., Google docs, MSWord “track changes,” PDF annotations and comments, Comment Press, the W3C Open Annotation System standard, and practices on blogs, GitHub, etc.)
4. **Envisage** the design and features of next-generation online platforms for extended “discursive exchange.”
5. Understand the vital role of **documentary reference**, not only intertextual (as is evidenced in citational practices, for example), but also intra-textual, and the use of such intra-documentary reference in annotations, comments, footnotes & endnotes, copy-editing practices, etc.
6. Develop familiarity with issues of **documentary identity**, and its implications for citation, annotation, commentary, and computer-based document systems.

B. Learning Outcomes

1. Develop conceptual tools for analysing and assessing online tools for editing, commenting, and annotation.
2. Develop the skills to recognize and formulate an appreciation both of the ways in which online tools improve on or extend their classical paper-based precursors, and also of the extent to which online tools have yet to provide as much power, flexibility, and expressive potential as their print-based predecessors.
3. Develop facilities for the “conceptual design” of systems far beyond the capabilities of present-day systems (rather than merely incremental or next-step forms of design, of the sort that could be implemented relatively straightforwardly).

III • Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 9) — Introduction, historical retrospective, and overview

Week 2 (Jan 16): **Annotation** and **locally-attached comments**

1. Steve Hockema (who taught at the iSchool) will come to class from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., to talk about *iAnnotate*,¹ a leading iPad annotation application that he designed and developed with Jim Brink.
2. Student reports on initial investigations of popular annotation and commenting systems and practices—with reference to the
 - a. Properties they *have* that future more-advanced systems should retain;
 - b. Properties they *lack*, which should be included in future systems;
 - c. Characterization of what they *do*, and what they *don't*, incorporate that classic text-based ACE practices were able to deal with.

Week 3 (Jan 23): **Annotation** and **locally-attached comments (cont'd)**

1. Completion of initial project reports on existing commenting/annotation systems.
2. Completion of initial list of analytic categories in terms of which to analyse ACE systems.

Week 4 (Jan 30): Inter- and Intra-document **reference**

Week 5 (Feb 6): Document **Identity**

Week 6 (Feb 13): Project **Reports**, Wrap-up, and Conclusion

¹<https://www.iannotate.com>

IV • Assignments

A. Assignment 1 — **Analysis** Due Jan 23; worth: 40% (presentation: 10%; written report: 30%)²

1. Form small groups (2–4 people) or work on your own—your choice.
2. Choose one common or familiar annotation or commenting system or practice—from the following list or of your own choosing (during class we will identify one person or group to “**take responsibility**” for reporting on each of the chosen systems or practices):
 - a. Blog or forum comment systems
 - b. Comment practices on GitHub
 - c. CommentPress
 - d. EndNote
 - e. Google Docs
 - f. Hand-written notes
 - g. MSWord “track changes”
 - h. OneNote
 - i. PDF Comments
 - j. Social reading tools (e.g. Social Book)
 - k. StackOverflow
 - l. Twitch
 - m. YouTube comments
 - n. ... Others?
3. Develop a **conceptual analysis** of
 - a. What the chosen system does (allows), and what it does not allow;
 - b. What its merits and demerits are;
 - c. How it compares (as best you can) to what is provided by *other contemporary digital systems* (including others on the above list for which are not the responsible party);
 - d. How, and in what ways, it compares to what was available in *print- and writing-based ACE practices*—i.e., what classic practices it does and does not provide, improves on or worsens, etc.
 - e. Suggestions of properties and/or capacities in terms of which it is helpful to characterize the system.
4. On Week 2 (Jan 16): Present an oral report (with written or visual aids as appropriate) on the chosen system (10 minutes max!), and solicit feedback from the rest of the class on their characterization of that system/practice.
5. By Week 3 (Jan 23): Submit, on Blackboard, a written (group or individual) report on the selected system, incorporating the feedback obtained from class discussion. The report should not merely be a *description* of what the system does. It should be an **analysis** of the system, framed in terms of a **conceptual framework** for analysing ACE systems more generally.

Preparing your report will thus involve two logical steps (though you will likely do them in parallel):

- a. Propose an analytic framework that believe would be useful (clear, concise, illuminating) for analyzing your and other ACE systems.

Our first (collective) step towards formulating such a conceptual framework is the list of categories or properties generated during initial project reports—which Hadas transcribed and made available.³ You will use this list as a basis for developing your framework. In constructing it, you will likely want: (i) to add additional concepts that you think would be valuable, or that would help organize or fill out the scheme, to give it coverage and intellectual coherence; and (ii) potentially leave out any categories that you don’t think are important, or are included on or subsumed by other categories, etc. I.e., your goal is to come up with a

²The standards against which assignments will be graded will depend on the number of people in the group (or recognize individual submissions appropriately).

³The list was compiled by Hadas (thanks!), and is available at:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FKkVXK88CX-2cRLbRFX94iP2sq7ZmVTIj8O4qfHy6VQ/edit?usp=sharing>

framework that is clean, distilled, and workable, while still being (reasonably) comprehensive.

Note that you don't want to include only those properties or categories that *your system* exhibits or deals with. One of the things you will likely want to say, in your analysis, is that your system does *not* deal with this or that issue. A way to think about this is that you should develop your framework so that it would be usable for the other projects your classmates are studying, as the basis for their analysis.

- b. Analyze your particular system in terms of your framework, explaining (see also IV.A.3 above):
 - i. What, in its present state, your system does and doesn't do (or deal with);
 - ii. Who your system is designed for, and what tasks it is good for;
 - iii. Who your system is *not* designed for, and what tasks it is not good for;
 - iv. What you think it *could* or *should* do (or deal with) if it were extended to be as useful as possible (i.e., were to maximize its potential). Be imaginative and daring.
6. Length: medium (5-15 pages, depending on number of people in the group). Grading will be based on analytic power, creative insight, and conceptual depth (not on length).
7. Submission: Assignment #1 reports should be posted on Blackboard, on the "Discussion Board."⁴

B. Assignment 3 — Conceptual **Design**

Worth: 60%

1. Details to be provided on Blackboard.

C. Notes

1. For group submissions, an addendum should be sent by email to the instructor with a statement from each group member stating that person's contribution to the overall effort. (Do not include this information in the report itself, which will be made available to the whole class.)
2. Group work will be expected to be proportional deeper and fuller than individual work (proportional the number of group members).
3. Note that this is **working, research investigation!** You are expected to use your initiative, find out and use the resources that will be relevant to your analysis.

D. Notes

1. Formatting:
 - a. File format: preferred: PDF, MSWord, or PowerPoint; acceptable: .rtf, .odt, or .txt
 - b. Minimum 1.5" (4 cm) margins on all 4 sides
 - c. 12 point font
 - d. Headings/footers (with project identifier and page numbers)
 - e. Student names and IDs the beginning.
 - f. Citations must be in a consistent, recognized professional style.
 - g. Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the day they are due.⁵
2. Late Assignments
 - a. Late assignments will be subjected to a penalty, unless:
 - i. Prior arrangements have been made with the instructor, including agreement on a specific later specific submission date; and
 - ii. Written medical documentation is provided at the time the assignment is submitted. U.of.T has recently changed the requirements on the submission of medical documenta-

⁴individual threads have been created for each project.

⁵Due to a peculiarity in Blackboard, anything posted at midnight will be recorded by Blackboard as having been submitted at 0:00 a.m. on the following date, and hence marked as late.

tion: the only form that is allowed to be considered is entitled “[Verification of Student Illness or Injury](#).”⁶

- b. Unless these requirements are met, penalties for late submission of any assignment will consist of a reduction of one grade point (A to A–, A– to B+, etc.) for every two days (including weekend days and holidays) that passes after the assignment is due.

E. Writing

1. Pay careful attention to the quality of your writing. Clarity, concision, and cogency are all highly valued, and will be included as grading criteria (§V.4, below). Correct spelling and grammar are expected. As stated in the iSchool’s Grade Interpretation Guidelines,⁷ “work that is not well written and grammatically correct will not generally be considered eligible for a grade in the A range, regardless of its quality in other respects.”
2. If you are having trouble with your English, please seek help early in the term. The [Office of English Language and Writing Support](#),⁸ at 63 Huron Street in the School of Graduate Studies, is designed to assist graduate students improve their oral and written communication skills. The services, all of which are free, are designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers. See the [current workshop schedule](#)⁹ or call (416) 946-7314 for more information. In addition, familiarize yourself with the resources available at the [U.of.T writing support web site](#).¹⁰

F. Grading

1. Assignments will be graded on the basis of clarity, insight, cogency, relevance, imagination, coherence, presentation, and mastery of the topic and relevant resources and literature.
2. Grading will conform to:
 - a. The iSchool’s [Grade Interpretation Guidelines](#);¹¹ and
 - b. The [University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy](#).¹²

V • Course Materials

A course website will be maintained on Blackboard. All required readings will be available on Blackboard. Other handouts and relevant materials will be posted when appropriate.

VI • Academic integrity

Honesty and fairness are considered fundamental values shared by students, staff and faculty at the University of Toronto. The essence of academic life revolves around fairness, the avoidance of cheating, and respect not only for the ideas of others, but also their rights to those ideas and their promulgation. In particular, it is essential the ideas and expressions of ideas of other people be handled and respectfully. In written assignments, when ideas or materials of others are used, *they must be cited*. Such attention to ideas and acknowledgment of their sources is central not only to academic life, but life in general.

Use of material by others without proper citation—called **plagiarism**—is absolutely forbidden, and considered to be a very grave academic offence. Please familiarize yourself with the U.of.T site [How Not to Plagiarize](#),¹³ and with the U.of.T policy detailing all policies and procedures surrounding academic offence.

⁶<http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca> (replaces the former “Student Medical Certificate,” which is no longer accepted)

⁷See §V.4, below.

⁸<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/english>

⁹<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Current-Years-Courses.aspx>

¹⁰<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>

¹¹<http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/grade-interpretation>

¹²<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf>

¹³<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>

es: the U.of.T [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).¹⁴

Appropriate citational behaviour is covered in the iSchool's "Cite it Right" workshop, which all iSchool students are expected to complete. The online Cite it Right quiz should be completed prior to the second week of classes. See the orientation portion of the [iSkills site](#).¹⁵

Note that *no U.of.T instructor has any discretion whatsoever in dealing with cases of plagiarism. All cases must be reported*. This is a very strict U.of.T rule, to which we, as instructors, are bound. In particular, it is explicitly forbidden for any instructor to "decide charitably to let a confused or repentant student off," no matter how much we might otherwise be tempted.

Note as well that citation is critical whether or not the cited passage or idea has been published. If you rely on an idea suggested by someone else (including another classmate, even at a coffee house or pub), make sure to cite the person and to give them full and appropriate credit (e.g.: Ebenezer Le Page, personal communication, Feb 30, 2017).

VII • Practical Stuff

- A. *Communication policy*: Except in unusual circumstances, please do not email questions about the course directly to the instructor. If you have a question, there is a very good chance that others in the class will have the same question—or at least will benefit from the answer. Please therefore post all questions to Blackboard (in the appropriate forum on the "Discussion Board") so that everyone in the class can benefit from your questions and from our answers. Questions posted to Blackboard will normally be answered within 24 hours (except on weekends and during reading week).
- B. *Accommodations*: Students with disabilities, diverse learning styles, and/or needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach the instructor, the Faculty of Information Registrar, and/or the [Accessibility Services Office](#)¹⁶ as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know about your needs, the more quickly we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

¹⁴<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>

¹⁵<http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/workshops>

¹⁶<http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>