Syllabus

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 from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

I • Coordinates

1. **Course:** INF2242: Studying Information and Knowledge Practices
   a. Term: Winter 2017
   b. Time: Monday, 6:30 p.m. — 9:30 p.m.
   c. Place: BL313 (Bissell Bldg., 140 St George Street, St.)
2. **Instructor:** Brian Cantwell Smith
   a. E-mail: brian.cantwell.smith@utoronto.ca
   b. Office: Room 633, Faculty of Information, Bissell Bldg.
   c. Office hours: Thursday, 10:00 a.m.. – 11:00 p.m.

II • Course Description and Objectives

A. *Here is the official course description:*

This is a seminar-style course that engages critical theories of knowledge-making practices and methodological approaches to their study. The focus is methodological and extends from the foundational themes and topics in information and knowledge. The emphasis is on how to study these issues, rather than merely on what the issues are. Approaches include ethnographic field studies, laboratory studies, critical discourse analysis, feminist science studies, social construction of technology, actor-network theory, activity theory, and distributed cognition.

B. *Or in other words:*

This course studies the applicability of different methods, methodologies, analytic frameworks, and theoretical approaches to information research within the context of **research design**. Students will:

1. Select a topic ("case") on which they would be interested in conducting research;
2. Study a number of concepts, methods, methodologies, and approaches that might be used to investigate this topic—figuring out, for each:
   a. Which aspects or dimensions of the topic would be illuminated by using those methods or analytic techniques——i.e., what would be brought into focus, would be given appropriate weight, would be likely to be adequately addressed, etc.;
   b. Which aspects or dimensions would *not* be illuminated, if those methods and techniques were used—i.e., would be misconstrued, unfairly "torqued," relegated to the background, or even "disappeared" from view; and, in general,
   c. How the choice of methods, approaches, techniques, etc., would affect the questions that

would be asked, influence the kinds of "results" that will be gleaned, and shape the form of knowledge that would be produced.

3. As a final project, develop a research proposal for investigating the topic, that:
   a. Describes the overarching issue and explains its interest and importance;
   b. Identifies the methods/methodologies/concepts/approaches that would be used to address the issue;
   c. Explains why that those approaches and frameworks were chosen;
   d. Formulates, in detail, the specific questions that would be asked so as to fit the chosen methodological/analytic framework; and
   e. Defends a claim that the proposed choice of methods or analytic techniques will "do the best justice" to the topic—by arguing how and why the results that would emerge from investigating the topic in this way would be most authentically illuminating of, fair to, and insightful into what matters most about the issue under investigation.

Since the proposed research project will not be conducted,[1] the proposal to be developed will in a certain sense be hypothetical. Nevertheless, the issues involved (and lessons learned) in its development will be generally applicable to any research or investigative project.

C. Course objectives:
   1. Read and discuss research papers introducing and examining a variety of research methods and methodologies employed in information research, including:
      a. Critical Information Studies
      b. Science and Technology Studies (STS—and the "sociological turn")
      c. Information Behaviour and/vs. Information Practice
      d. Participatory Action Research
      e. Ethnographic and Virtual Ethnographic Research
      f. Grounded Theory
      g. Infrastructure Studies
      h. Social Construction
      i. Actor Network Theory
      j. Laboratory Studies
      k. Distributed Cognition
      l. Activity Theory
   2. Provide support, in a seminar-style format, for students' development of their cases and research proposals;

D. Learning outcomes:
   1. Understand the need for, and role of, a framing methodology, theoretical framework, analytic approach, or equivalent epistemological stance towards any research or theoretical investigation.
   2. Develop familiarity with a variety of methods and approaches used in contemporary information research.
   3. Learn how to design and develop a research proposal in an area of contemporary importance in information research.
   4. Recognize the impact of methods, frameworks, approaches, and analytic techniques on research investigations—by affecting the kinds of question that can be asked, the types of issue that are

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[1] At least it is not a requirement of this course!

foregrounded and those that are related to the background or "disappeared," the sorts of result that can be obtained, and the form of knowledge that can be produced.

5. Recognize the perils of placing prior allegiance on a method or methodology in advance of dispassionate consideration of the subject matter and issue to be addressed.

6. Develop skills in selecting one or more methods, theoretical frameworks, and/or analytic approaches in research design so as to "do justice to" what matters most about a topic under investigation.

These learning outcomes amplify general [MI Program's Learning Outcomes](#)[2] by developing skills needed to *conduct research* on topics with respect to which information professionals need to develop mastery and provide leadership, One of the distinguishing characteristics of our emerging information environment is the fact that *knowing things*, per se, is often less important—and less a mark of professional-level expertise and capability—than the ability to *find out what is relevant,* in a dispassionate, thorough, and methodologically informed way. It is towards developing tools for this latter skill that INF2242 is dedicated.

III • Cases

We will use real-world case materials as a basis on which to assess the methods and concepts introduced in the course readings. Students will develop their own specific case, based on their own interests, that addresses an important information issue, as supported by academic and journalistic materials. Themes might include issues of intellectual property, surveillance, privacy, digital media and identity, transformations in labor or leisure, etc.

Some examples (for illustration only; you should choose a topic that you are interested in):[3]

1. Information and Drones
   — Cf. Stanford/NYU report: http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Living-Under-Drones.pdf

2. Unpaid Social Media Labour
   — Cf. "They say it's friendship. We say it's unwaged work" (http://wagesforfacebook.com)

3. Monitoring social media at work
   — Cf. http://www.wsj.com/articles/should-companies-monitor-their-employees-social-media-1399648685

4. "Netflix: Goodbye Blockbusters"
   — Cf. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/03/netflix-oscar-movies_n_4892961.html

5. Digital rights management in computer games:
   — Cf. http://www.shacknews.com/onearticle.x/54887

6. Privacy by Design
   — Cf. http://www.cdt.org/policy/role-privacy-design-protecting-consumer-privacy

7. CCV Cameras in UK:
   — Cf. http://www.yourprivacy.co.uk/cctvsystems.html

8. Online identity and Facebook:
   — Cf. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_52/b4161092194568.htm

9. Personal Digital Archiving:
   — Cf. http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/news/2010/20100519news_article_personal_archiving_day.html

10. Privacy rights of the dead
    — Cf. http://law.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/journals/lawreview/lrv_issues_v37n03_cc4_smolensky_final.pdf

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[2] http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/studies/learning-outcomes
[3] These links are quite dated. You will want to uncover more recent coverage of your chosen topic.

IV • Assignments

Students will be graded on four items: their class participation and on-going development of case materials, over the course of the semester, and three assignments:

A. Case posting and class discussion   **Due ongoing — Worth 20%**

Each student is responsible for posting a link (or citation) and providing a brief write-up on Blackboard (one paragraph or less) of found case materials by midnight (11:59 p.m.[4]) the *day before* each seminar (i.e. by Sunday night), starting the 3rd week of class.[5] The weekly case materials should connect to the relevant concept or methodology to be discussed in the following seminar. For example, if that week's discussion focuses on 'actor-network theory', then the chosen materials should be appropriate to this method, and the write-up should highlight and describe the connection.

B. Assignment #1— Case write-up   **Due Feb 17 (Week 6) — Worth 20%**

A narrative description of the case and its relevance (3-5 pages), due Feb 17 (the end of week 6, before Reading Week). This should include links to relevant documents and online sources, including ones described in class. Some points about cases (see also http://archive.tlt.psu.edu/suggestions/cases/).

a. *Topic or general area:* The situation or issue with which the case is involved.

b. *Real-Word Scenario:* Cases are generally based on real world situations, although some facts may be changed to simplify the scenario or "protect the innocent."

c. *Supporting Data and Documents:* Effective cases typically involves real world artifacts for analysis. These can be simple data tables, links to real URL's, quoted statements or testimony, supporting documents, images, video, audio, or any appropriate material.

d. *Open-Ended Question/Problem:* Most case are based on a general overarching (and often open-ended) question or problem, which may be subject to different interpretations, susceptible to multiple potential solutions, etc. (Multiple people or teams may investigate the same case and come up with widely varying "answers" or proposed solutions, etc.).

C. Assignment #2 — Draft Research proposal   **Due Mar 20 (Week 10) — Worth 20%**

A 2,500–3,000 word (10–12 page) draft of your research proposal is due by March 20 (week 10). This proposal should provide an outline or skeleton[6] of the final Proposal, briefly describe your planned case, and list appropriate methods and concepts highlighted during the course.

D. Assignment #3 — Final Research Proposal   **Due April 13 (end of semester) — Worth 40%**

A 4,000–5,000 word (20–25 page) final research proposal is due on Thursday, April 13 (the last day of the semester). It should include a description of your case and its relevance, planned methods and useful concepts for addressing the critical information issues described within, and include a bibliography of scholarly readings and supporting case materials.

Additional information and/or details on assignments may be posted from time to time on Blackboard.

V.1 — Submission Requirements

1. All assignments should be submitted in Blackboard, formatted as follows:

   a. File format: .docx (preferred), .doc, .pdf, .rtf, .odt, or .txt

   b. Minimum 1.5" (4 cm) margins on all 4 sides

   c. 12 point font

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[4]Blackboard is incapable of recognizing that 12:00 a.m. is midnight of the previous day; it records it as being on the next day!

[5]So the first posting should be on or before midnight on Jan 22.

[6]See the Appendix (pp. 14–17) to the Writing Tips, at "Syllabus > INF2242 · Writing Tips" on Blackboard.

    d. Student name and ID in the upper right corner of every page (no credit for unidentified pages!)

2. Citations must be in a consistent, recognized professional style.

3. Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the day they are due.[7]

V.2 — Late Assignments

1. Late assignments will be subjected to a penalty, unless:

    a. Prior arrangements have been made with the instructor, including agreement on a specific later specific submission date; and

    b. Written medical documentation is provided at the time the assignment is submitted. U.of.T has recently changed its requirements for submission of medical documentation. The only form that is allowed to be considered is entitled "Verification of Student Illness or Injury."[8,9]

2. 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) after the assignment is due.

V.3 — 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,[10] "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,[11] 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[12] 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.[13]

3. As a somewhat idiosyncratic addition to the above resources, I have also made available, on Blackboard, a set of "Writing Tips,"[14] to keep in mind while preparing your assignments.

V.4 — Grading

1. Assignments will be graded on the basis of clarity, insight, cogency, relevance, mastery of the topic and relevant resources and literature, and coherence of argument and presentation.

2. Grading will conform to:

    a. The iSchool's Grade Interpretation Guidelines;[15] and

    b. The University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy.[16]

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[7]Due 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.

[8]http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca

[9]This new form replaces the former "Student Medical Certificate," which is no longer accepted.

[10]See §V.4, below.

[11]http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/english

[12]http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Current-Years-Courses.aspx

[13]http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/

[14]Available on Blackboard under "Syllabus > INF2242 · Writing Tips".

[15]http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/grade-interpretation

[16]http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf

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,[17] and with the U.of.T policy detailing all policies and procedures surrounding academic offences: the U.of.T Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters.[18]

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.[19]

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. *Academic Dates:* Monday, Feb 27 is the final date to drop the courses without academic penalty.

C. *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[20] 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.

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[17] http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize
[18] http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm
[19] http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/workshops
[20] http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/

VIII • Readings

(Jan 9 — Introduction)

Jan 16 — Critical Information Systems, and an overview of STS and IS

1) Cecez-Kecmanovic, Dubravka (2005). "Basic assumptions of the Critical Research Perspectives in Information Systems." Ch. 2 in Howcroft, D., & Trauth, E. M. (eds), *Handbook of Critical Information Systems Research: Theory and Application*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

2) Vaidhyanathan, Siva (2006), "Afterword: Critical Information Studies: A Bibliographic Manifesto." *Cultural Studies*, 20(2-3):292-315

3) Van House, Nancy A. (2003). "Science and Technology Studies and Information Studies." Ch. 1 in Blaise Cronin (ed.), *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 38, pp. 3-86. Information Today, Inc. for the American Society for Information Science and Technology. Read pp. 3–37.

Week 2

Jan 23 — STS and IS: Key concepts

1) Van House, Nancy A. (2003). "Science and Technology Studies and Information Studies." Ch. 1 in Blaise Cronin (ed.), *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 38, pp. 3-86. Information Today, Inc. for the American Society for Information Science and Technology. Read pp. 37–86.

2) Cronin, Blaise (2008), "The Sociological Turn in Information Science," Journal of Information Science, 34 (4): 465–475

Week 3

Jan 30 — Information, Knowledge, Practice

1) Nonaka, I. (1994). "A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation." *Organization Science*, 5(1), 14–37.

2) Savolainen, R. (2007). "Information Behavior and Information Practice: Reviewing the 'Umbrella Concepts' of Information-Seeking Studies." *The Library Quarterly*, 77(2), 109-132.

Week 4

Feb 6 — Study of practice

1) Orlikowski, W. J. (2002). "Knowing in Practice: Enacting a Collective Capability in Distributed Organizing." *Organization Science*, 13(3), 249–273.

2) Kemmis, S., & Wilkinson, M. (1998). "Participatory action research and the study of practice." In B. Atweh, S. Kemmis, & P. Weeks (eds.), *Action research in practice: Partnership for social justice in education* (pp. 21–36). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Week 5

Feb 13 — Methodologies: Ethnographic Approaches

1) Coleman, E. Gabriella (2010, September 23). "Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media." Review-article. Retrieved December 22, 2010, from
http://www.annualreviews.org/eprint/gzYRzazRZpBjEGWfcWr5/full/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104945

2) Hine, D. C. M. (2000). *Virtual Ethnography* (1st ed.). Sage Publications Ltd. (Ch. 3).

Week 6

———————————————— Reading Week ————————————————

Feb 27 — Methodologies: Content and Participant Approaches

1) Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (1990), "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria." Qualitative Sociology, 13 (1), 3–21.

2) Baskerville, R. (1999) "Investigating Information Systems with Action Research," *Communications of The Association for Information Systems*, (2) Article 19.

3) Holton, Judith A. (2008), "Grounded Theory as a General Research Methodology," *Grounded Theory Review*, 7 (2), June.

Week 7

Mar 6 — Concepts: Infrastructures

Week 8

1) Hughes, Thomas Parke, and American Council of Learned Societies. (1993). *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880–1930.* John Hopkins University Press, Chapter 1 · "Introduction."

2) Bowker, Geoffrey C., Baker, K.S., Millerand, Florence and Ribes, David (2009) "Towards Information Infrastructure Studies: Ways of Knowing in a Networked Environment," in J.D. Hunsinger, M. Allen and L. Klastrup (eds), *International Handbook of Internet Research*:. Springer.

Mar 13 — Methods: Social Construction

Week 9

1) Sterne, J. and Leach, J. (2005) "The Point of Social Construction and the Purpose of Social Critique." *Social Epistemology* 19: pp. 283-285 (Intro to Special Issue on Social Construction of Technology)

2) Humphreys, L. (2005) "Reframing Social Groups, Closure, and Stabilization in the Social Construction of Technology." *Social Epistemology*, 19, 231-253.

Mar 20 — Concepts: Networks

Week 10

1) Boase, J. (2013). "Implications of Software-based Mobile Media for Social Research." *Mobile Media & Communication*, 1(1), 57-62.

2) Johnson, J. (1995). "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer." In S. L. Star (Ed.), *Ecologies of Knowledge: Work and Politics in Science and Technology* (pp. 257-277). SUNY Press. Online in *Social Problems*, Vol. 35, No. 3, *Special Issue: The Sociology of Science and Technology*, June 1988.

3) Khoo, M. (2005) "Technologies Aren't What They Used to Be: Problematising Closure and Relevant Social Groups: Recognizing the Role of the Modern Business Corporation in the Social Construction of Technology." *Social Epistemology*, 19, 283-285.

4) Law, J. (1992). "Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity," published by the Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA14YN

Mar 27 — Methods: Laboratory and Community Studies

Week 11

1) Knorr Cetina, Karin D. (1995). "Laboratory Studies: The Cultural Approach to the Study of Science," in S. Jasanoff, G.E. Markle, J.C. Petersen and T.J. Pinch (eds.), *Handbook of Science, Technology and Society*, Los Angeles, Sage

2) Star, Susan, and Strauss, Anselm (1999). "Layers of Silence, Arenas of Voice: The Ecology of Visible and Invisible Work." *Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (CSCW) V8, no. 1 (March 1): 9–30.

3) Brown, J. S., and P. Duguid (1991). "Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation." *Organization Science*: 40-57.

Apr 3 — Methods: Distributed Cognition

Week 12

1) Suchman, L. (2000). "Embodied Practices of Engineering Work." *Mind Culture and Activity*, 7:1/2 p. 4-18.

2) James Hollan, Edwin Hutchins, and David Kirsh (2000). "Distributed cognition: toward a new foundation for human-computer interaction research." *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, Volume 7, Issue 2 (June 2000).

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