Information Insight I

(JOUR 860: Spring 2017)

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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 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 understanding 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 but usually much sooner.

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 leading or participating in workshops Jan. 10-13 and Jan. 25-27, 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:
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> Discussion: 60%
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> Individual project: 30%
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> Learning journal: 10%
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> **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.

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, analyzes 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 three types of assignments: discussions, through which you will critically analyze ideas and concepts from readings and other material; 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. You will be able to turn in several drafts of your research project for feedback and revision, at least until the final deadline. That won't be possible with discussions, though, so put forth your best work each week.

See Blackboard for a detailed list of readings, assignments and deadlines. Please pay attention to the weekly email messages I send. I'll note any changes there. 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 or via email.

Discussions (60% 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 in your discussions. That's what I'm looking for in A work. (See the rubric for details.) I will also give you two broad discussion questions each week.

Discussions should generally take this format:

❖ **Roles**. I will assign roles for each discussion, rotating responsibilities each week. The goal is to improve the discussions by helping you identify different perspectives. Each of you has different jobs, perspectives and experience, and you should bring those perspectives to each discussion, as well. Groups are welcome to create additional roles, but I will assign these each week:

➢ *Discussion leader*. This is just what it sounds like. This person should start the discussion and make sure it stays on track. The first post in each group isn't due until Wednesday, but the discussion leader should try to post by Tuesday so that others don't have to wait.

➢ *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, especially from previous discussions. Everyone should work at this, of course, but the synthesizer should bring in previous material and other ideas that provide a broader perspective. This person will also monitor other group discussions and bring in interesting ideas and perspectives from those discussions. For instance, the synthesizer for the first discussion in group 1 should monitor the same conversation in group 2. This will help with sharing ideas among the entire class, but it will also help you get to know everyone in the other group.

➢ *Reporter*. This person will participate in the discussion but at the end will summarize it and post a synopsis on Slack within a couple of days after the discussions close. That report should contain a list of outside resources that are brought up in the discussions.

❖ **Deadlines**. New discussions will begin on Mondays (except for the first week). Students should post at least once by Wednesday and then at least three more times by Sunday night. 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.

❖ **Tone and respect.** As with all live and online discussion, please be considerate of others. Don't berate others' thoughts or comments, and don't make personal disparagements. We come from many different backgrounds 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 & course docs folder on Blackboard.

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:

- ❖ **Jan. 1**: In your journal on Blackboard, identify an area you would like to explore, along with some general questions you have about that topic. Share your ideas with classmates on Slack so you can receive feedback and give feedback to others.
- ❖ **Jan. 1-21**: Read widely in popular media, trade publications and academic literature, and create a bibliography. Explain your progress in your journal.
- ❖ **Jan. 22**: Post an introduction and bibliography for your proposal on the #projectdiscussions channel of Slack. 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.
- ❖ **Feb. 19**: Literature review due, along with a revised introduction. Send this to me directly on Slack.

❖ **March 5**: Submit final paper with an introduction, review of literature, and an outline of next steps for exploring this question. Send this directly to me on Slack.

Those who are pursuing a certificate rather than a degree in Digital Content Strategy degree have the option of doing something other than a project proposal. For instance, that might be a more traditional research paper or something else that relates to your interests. I'm open to ideas, but whatever you take on must have a research component. Please talk to me individually if you would like to do this.

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. Because this class is abbreviated, I will have you complete only three entries: one during the first week, an update by Jan. 15, and a final entry on Jan. 27. 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 digital content strategy 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?

Jan. 15 entry. In this entry, revisit your learning goals, altering them as necessary. Explain how you have worked toward those goals. Where have you succeeded? Where do you still need to improve? What components of the class are going well? Which are not going as well as you would like? Also provide an update of your research project. What progress have you made? Are you comfortable with the direction? Are you finding the types of sources you need? Is there anything you need help with?

Final entry. Your final entry should be a self-evaluation for the course. It should provide a reflection on your work in the class and an explanation of the work you need to do to complete your project proposal or paper. 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?
- ❖ Again, provide an update on your project and explain how you will complete the project in the weeks that follow.

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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