IRLS 588-011: Cultural Influences on Information Systems

Instructor: Seavey

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

IRLS 588-011: Cultural Influences on Information Systems
School of Information Resources and Library Science
Summer, 2010: Seavey

This syllabus is being written in February. When the course appears on D2L please check the version that I will post then. Who knows what might change in the intervening four months? None of the really big items, but still it is best to check.

Students are responsible for knowing the contents of this syllabus and completing all assignments in accordance with the schedule herein. If it is in here, you are expected to know it.

The basic premise of this class is that information (broadly defined) is a social construct- that is what we perceive as knowledge, or indeed wisdom, are not immutable truths but are propositions constructed by human beings and therefore subject to all the prejudices, preconceived notions, political correctness (or incorrectness,) notions of social acceptability, and simple vagaries of the times to which humans respond both individually and socially.

By extension many, if not all, of the structures (broadly defined) we use in libraries to identify, describe, house, manage, make accessible, and interpret the information we have gathered are likewise subject to all the factors described above. The Italian neo-Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, has propounded a theory, or at least way of looking at the world, that gives us a useful perspective from which to consider the place and practice of librarianship. The term "cultural hegemony" may well have antecedents to Gramsci's writings, but it is his work that defined the theoretical construct with which we are dealing, and brought the notion into the intellectual mainstream. "Cultural hegemony" as a search term in Google produces somewhere over 741,000 hits as of 2/10/10 and 74,300 for "cultural hegemony gramsci's theory." The concept has found its way into theoretical discussions in journalism and education on a fairly wide basis, and at least some influence on the discourse of librarianship. We will pursue that discourse. While you will, I hope, learn some things about "how" libraries do things, this course is far more about thinking about what we do, how we do it, and the possibility that there is a larger context that drives our current practice in ways we may not even realize. In short, park your preconceived notions at the door, and prepare to indulge in critical thinking.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Expected Outcomes:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to Demonstrate adeptness at asynchronous discussion of complex ideas through the regular posting of succinct and thoughtful insights into the readings and into other students posts;
Discuss and evaluate different theories of the information society and their implications for information professionals. Analyze reading material (including other students work) critically and perceptively.

**Methods for Achieving Outcomes** Learning methods include reading, writing, asynchronous discussions guided by the instructor, assessments by the instructor, and peer evaluation. Research has shown that people learn best when they take an active rather than a passive role. Consequently, while I will act as guide and facilitator, I expect students to seek knowledge, test ideas, question assumptions, polish your writing, and activate your intellectual interests.

**REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:**

**Texts:**

*Gramsci's Politics* by Anne Showstack Sassoon
Forgacs, David, ed. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*
Marcia Landy *Film, Politics, and Gramsci*

I will not be ordering these through the UA bookstore. For various reasons that I do not want to put into print. As of February, 2010 all of these are available on Amazon, both used and new for not outrageous amounts of money. If Amazon doesn't work try ABE or one of the other bookfinder sites. Get at least two of them- Landy and Sassoon would be my first choices, but Forgacs works well too. There are a myriad of Gramsci books around. I have used these texts for quite a while because they are the most readable, and more closely focused on the concepts I want to get over. Gramsci himself wrote in Italian, and in the sometimes tortured language of the Italian far left of the 1920s. Marxist language is often laden with terminology that is not always obvious to non-practitioners of that end of the spectrum. Some of Gramsci's later writings had to be published under the watchful eye of Mussolini's fascist government which didn't do too much for clarity. A fair number of Gramsci's works have been translated. There are extensive bibliographies of Gramsci material, two of which are [http://www.victoryiscertain.com/gramsci/](http://www.victoryiscertain.com/gramsci/) and [http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/recent_publications/index.html](http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/recent_publications/index.html). Feel free to move around on both sites.

In addition start with these articles: "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities" *The American Historical Review* Vol. 90, No. 3 T. J. Jackson Lears, Full text in JSTOR.

"On Gramsci" *Daedalus*, 1 July 2002, Joseph A Buttigieg, full text in JSTOR.


Then read


The January, 2003 issue of *Library Quarterly* contains other articles responsive to Wiegand, by John Budd, and Gary and Marie Radford. Definitely worth reading the lot.

I would like you to have the articles read by the end of the second week of class. Use the various texts as back up, supplemental, whatever if the articles don't cover a particular topic in enough depth for you. I am asking you to do a lot of heavy reading early in the course so we can get everybody on the same theoretical page before I start commenting on various information structures librarians have built to organize and make accessible the material in our institutions. I expect a lot of questions and discussion on the discussion board as we get these theoretical notions lined up.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Requirements and such**

The major project for the class will be a long paper, explained in more detail below. In a full semester there would be two, one long and one short, but I think summer school may be a little compressed for that. In lieu of the short paper there will be a mid-term exam covering the material through week 7. Which isn't exactly mid-point, but fits conceptually. The exam will be largely essay in nature. It will be take home, as D2L and I do not agree on how to do exams. There will be a final exam, similar to the mid-term but covering the whole course.
See the schedule below for due dates.

Grading Students will be evaluated on the following:
The long paper 40%
The mid-term 20%
The Final Exam: 20%

Class Participation: 20%. By this I mean informed conversation on the discussion board. Simply saying "I agree" to somebody else's post is not informed conversation. This class requires a lot of thinking on your part, and participation is critical to working out your thoughts on the topic. I will establish a students only forum on the discussion board for you to work out ideas among yourselves, although there will be weekly fora for issues raised by each week's material.

. Semester Paper (40%). Select an information agency or structure*. How does that agency or structure reflect (or not) the cultural hegemony of that portion of society it is designed to serve? If it is designed to serve the entire population, does it, in fact, do so? What can we learn about both the agency/structure, and its contextual society, by looking at both through the concept of cultural hegemony?
*by information structure I mean a system designed to provide access, or deliver, information that can be used across a number of agencies. A classification scheme would be an example of an information structure. So would the copyright system, or a public library, or.....

Take a look at some of the examples- which I will provide a bit downstream. Somebody remind me if it looks as if I have forgotten. Choose a topic with which you are familiar, or in which you have some interest, and see how that topic is treated by your subject access system.

COURSE, SCHOOL, AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Academic Code of Integrity

Students are expected to abide by The University of Arizona Code of Academic Integrity. The guiding principle of academic integrity is that a student's submitted work must be the student's own. 'If you have any questions regarding what is acceptable practice under this Code, please ask an Instructor.

Accommodating Disabilities

The University has a Disability Resource Center. If you anticipate the need for reasonable accommodations to meet the requirements of this course, you must register with the Disability Resource Center and request that the DRC send me, the Instructor, official notification of your accommodation needs as soon as possible. Please plan to meet with me by appointment or during office hours to discuss accommodations and how my course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate.

Assignment Policies

IMPORTANT INFORMATION :

1. Late material will be graded down at the rate of 10% of the grade per day late. Which means that a paper that would normally grade a 90 is a day late, the grade is 81. If two days late the grade is 72. After that you don't want to think about it. If, and only if

, you let me know beforehand that there are going to be problems we can make adjustments. Problems do not include vacation, family reunions, or trips to concerts. I can be flexible, but remember you are a student in graduate school.

2. I expect submitted papers to be written in clear, concise, and grammatically correct English. Material not meeting these standards will be redone until they do so, losing points along the way. Instructions on What a Paper Should Look Like are
posted in the content area of D2L. Do not fail to heed this document. All material will be submitted in electronic format. Standards for submission are in the box below. Kindly read them and follow directions. My inclination towards mercy on this topic is not what it used to be.

Standards for Submitting Material in Electronic Format

In order to facilitate the whole process of grading and returning papers, quizzes, and anything else, in electronic form the following standards should be followed. If material is not submitted according to these standards it will arrive back in your lap with no grade assigned. I will accept submissions written in Word, or WordPerfect, and saved as .doc, .wpd, or RTF files. If you are going to use anything else, check with me first. Do not write papers in HTML - I think I said that somewhere already.

1. Formatting Your Submission

Word processed papers are the only kind I will accept. The following standards apply.

A. Margins.
   Top and bottom margins: 1 inch.
   Left and right margins: 1.25 inches, or as close as you can get. This largely has to do with what I can see on a screen. Trifocals and old age are not necessarily compatible with teeny tiny print.

B. Type Size.
   Type size should be 12 points. I don't care about font, but have mercy on my trifocals and set it at 12 points. I recognize that larger point sizes are a way of artificially lengthening your paper, and will automatically reset anything larger than 12 points back to the required size. Please do not use the Courier or sans serif typefaces.

C. Heading. The heading of all submissions should include the following information:
   Your name
   The title of the paper, or whatever.
   The class for which the paper has been written.
   The name of the professor for whom the paper has been written.
   The semester in which the paper has been written.
   The word processor and version in which the paper is written.

   Hence:

   Another Country: Searching for the Southwest United States
   Your Name
   9450, Spring, 2008
   Professor Seavey
   WordPerfect version 11

   I don't care if it is centered like, that, or in that particular order, but the information elements should all be present.

2. Checking Your Submission

A. Spell Checking.
   Most, if not all, current word processors have a built in spell checker. Use it. Spell check dictionaries are not always comprehensive, so if the spell checker complains about a word that seems legitimate to you, have a dictionary handy just to make sure you have it correct. If my spell checker complains about something in your submission, that is what I do... if it is a word that does not exist, or is spelled wrong, woe be unto you, as I will knock off points. Kindly take this admonition seriously. Spell checking is so basic I should not even have to mention it, and my tolerance level for not using it is far less than it used to be.

B. Proof Reading
   The spell checker only catches spelling errors, it doesn't care about context. So if you are thinking "too many" and write "two many," the spell checker won't catch it. The prof once wrote a lengthy explanation of a statistical technique called
"factor analysis," and distributed it to a doctoral seminar. Everybody was fascinated with my somewhat peculiar explanation of "factory analysis." The point is, read your paper, and see if it makes sense. Or have your significant other read it, or your next door neighbor. Most folks, after they have read their own work once or twice, see exactly what they want to see, not the mistakes.

C. Grammar Checking
Most word processors have a grammar checker. I have mixed feelings about these because most of them are set to something akin to standard business English usage, which may not be appropriate for academic papers. Word underlines things that it does not like in green. I at least look at those bits and see if I can figure out the nature of the complaint. The use of "that" and "which," in my work has improved considerably since I started using this.

3. Naming Your Submission
Filenames.
The name of your submission will be your last name, and only your last name. Modifications are acceptable only where two classmembers share a common last name. In that case the form of entry will be: last name first initial: seaveyc, rather than just seavey. Note that capitalization is not necessary. Do not worry if you wind up sending in more than one thing with the same file name. The professor is old enough to understand folders, sub-directories, and tree structures. Trust me, I can keep all this stuff separate.

B. Extenders.
Most word processor (in fact most current programs) assign an identifier, known as a file extender, to files processed by that program. The file extender identifies the type of file to the user- human or computer- trying to look at the contents of that file. Some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>File Extender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word for Windows</td>
<td>.doc or .docx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excel (a spreadsheet)</td>
<td>.xls or .xlsx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WordPerfect (most recent version)</td>
<td>.wpd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lotus Organizer</td>
<td>.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Joint Photographic Experts Group graphics file</td>
<td>.jpg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The program you are using will assign the file extender. Make sure that this is so. Experiment with whatever you are using and if file extenders are not assigned, ask the prof for advice.

That, I think, should do it. If there are questions, let me know.

3. Papers may be written in either Word or WordPerfect. I can translate pretty much any other word processor, although if you are not using Word or WP please check with me first- send me a test file just to make sure I can translate before we get into difficulties.

HOW TO WRITE FOR THIS COURSE

Incompletes

The current Catalog reads

The grade of I may be awarded only at the end of a term, when all but a minor portion of the course work has been satisfactorily completed. The grade of I is not to be awarded in place of a failing grade or when the student is expected to repeat the course; in such a case, a grade other than I must be assigned. Students should make arrangements with the instructor to receive an incomplete grade before the end of the term ...
If the incomplete is not removed by the instructor within one year the I grade will revert to a failing grade.

**GRADING:**

Grading Students will be evaluated on the following:
The long paper 40%
The mid-term 20%
The Final Exam: 20%

A word on grading.

This is graduate school. Simply doing the work on time in a reasonable fashion earns a grade of "B." The grade of "A" is reserved for work that shows evidence of going beyond the mere requirements of completing the assignment. In graduate school a grade of C is basically a failure. Critical thinking is a

*must*

in this class. This is a complex topic, and you should not slant your thinking to what you think I think. I've been grappling with this stuff for well over 20 years now and still haven't completely made up my mind on many of the issues raised.

**INSTRUCTOR NAME AND CONTACT ADDRESSES:**

Charley Seavey

seavey@email.arizona.edu

SKYPE: Desert11Sailor - appointment only, or scheduled time that I'll figure out when we get to summer session.s

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