IRLS617-010 Social Epistemology and Information Science

Updated Wed, 12/08/2010 - 11:53

COURSE NAME, NUMBER AND PREREQUISITES:

Social Epistemology and Information Science
IRLS 617 Section 010

This course addresses several of the SIRLS Student Competencies (especially A1, B4, C8, and C9).

Prerequisite: IRLS 504 or consent of the instructor.

Instructor: Don Fallis

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"Applies various theories of knowledge to information science. Emphasis on identifying practices that information services such as libraries can adopt to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge."

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Basically, epistemology is concerned with how it is that people know what they know. Work in epistemology has typically focused on how individuals working alone acquire knowledge about the world. However, in the past few decades, researchers have been looking at how people acquire knowledge in a social context. Social epistemology is concerned, for example, with how a person acquires knowledge from other people. But why should social epistemology be of interest to library and information professionals?

Note: One clue that it might be of interest is that the term social epistemology was first used by two library scientists: Jesse Shera and Margaret Egan of the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago.

When someone goes to a library or surfs the Internet for information, s/he typically wants to acquire some knowledge. Information professionals try to facilitate this acquisition of knowledge. Librarians want the patron to be better informed when s/he leaves the library than when s/he arrived. (In fact, this is arguably the sine qua non of libraries.) Social epistemology is concerned with how we can go about achieving this goal. In other words, it is concerned with identifying those practices that best facilitate the acquisition of knowledge (see, e.g., Goldman 1999 and Shera 1961).
In the first part of this course, we will survey some of the current theoretical work in social epistemology. Next, we will look at several practical applications of social epistemology to information science (e.g., in the areas of collection management, reference work, access to information, and the Internet). We will look at practices and services that the producers and disseminators of information are in a position to implement and we will try to determine how well these practices foster the acquisition of knowledge from recorded information. For example, do guidelines for evaluating information on the Internet improve epistemic outcomes for Internet users? Does the existence of Wikipedia allow people to acquire more knowledge or simply more unjustified beliefs?

**Technical Prerequisites:**

Students taking this course will need to satisfy the standard SIRLS technical requirements. In addition, several assignments in this course require students to create web pages. Furthermore, at least one assignment requires students to create a web page and post it on the web. Tips for doing this will be posted in D2L. Please contact the instructor if you have questions about these prerequisites.

**Course Format:**

This course will be taught virtually using a D2L course on the Web. Enrolled students will be given accounts by the start of the semester.

**Note:** Information about using D2L is available at [http://sirls.arizona.edu/resources/computing#d2l](http://sirls.arizona.edu/resources/computing#d2l). If you have trouble with D2L, you can contact the D2L Support Staff ([d2l@email.arizona.edu](mailto:d2l@email.arizona.edu)). (In addition, you can contact the SIRLS "D2L GAT" for the semester.) Send the D2L staff an email message explaining exactly what is happening.

I plan to post one lecture per week. I plan to post these lectures on Wednesday afternoon or evening. So, you should find them posted in the "Content" area of the D2L course by the following morning.

I will set up a discussion forum for each lecture. Online discussions of the content of the course will take place in these forums. The participation requirement for this course requires active participation in these discussions. Lectures will typically conclude with a few possible discussion questions. You should have something thoughtful to say (a question, a comment, a reply, etc.) every week or so. But in order to stay up-to-date on discussions and announcements, you should check into D2L every day or so.

**Note:** The last day of classes this semester is December 9th. This will be the last official day for participation. However, D2L should still be accessible for at least a couple of weeks after that point. I will still be checking in on the discussions and you are free to continue posting to the discussion forums.

**Note:** I do not always post announcements on the D2L Course Home page. I often post announcements in the Main discussion forum. That way, people can reply to the announcement if they have questions or need clarification. So, please be sure to check any postings to the "Main" discussion forum (or the other Administrative discussion forums, for that matter).

I have a couple of small requests with regard to the discussion forums. These forums will be our main mode of communication in this course. In order to keep this communication more or less organized, I will set up different forums for different purposes. For example, in addition to a forum for each lecture, I will also set up a "Greetings" forum for you to describe who you are and why you are taking this particular course. So, my first request is that you try to direct your comments to the appropriate forum. My second request is that you use D2L email, instead of the forums, for any personal correspondence.

**Note:** If I need to communicate with you directly, I will typically send you a D2L email message. So, in addition to regularly checking the discussion forums, you need to regularly check your D2L email account (or you need to have your D2L email forwarded to your regular email account).

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of this course, students will:

- know the various ways in which libraries and other information services can affect people's ability to acquire knowledge.
• understand the main theories and concepts in the field of social epistemology.
• be able to use these theories and concepts to evaluate policies in libraries and other information services.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS:

There is no required text to buy. However, the following book on social epistemology is highly recommended:


The required readings for this course (which are subject to modification) will all be available electronically. Some readings are on the web. Other readings will be available as PDFs within D2L. Still other readings are in journals that can be accessed online through UA Library. You will need a CatCard number to access these readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are five components that go into the final course grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation is discussed above under Course Format.

The Midterm will consist of a few essay questions (and probably a few short answer questions) that cover the lectures, readings, and discussions. It will be posted on a Wednesday in the middle of the semester in lieu of a lecture. The midterm will be due one week after it is assigned (i.e., the following Wednesday). Note: All of the assignments in this course (including the midterm) will be due at 11:59pm Tucson time. I don't plan to start grading them at midnight; I just want to be sure that I have them in my hands when I get up the following morning. By the way, Tucson is always on Mountain Standard Time (MST).

The Group Presentation requires each of you to participate in creating an online presentation on a topic within the scope of social epistemology and information science. These presentations will take place during the last few weeks of the semester. Each group will sign up for a specific date to put their presentation online. We will treat the presentations like any other virtual lecture. For instance, I will set up a forum for each presentation, presentations will be required reading, etc. Note: I do understand that group presentations, especially in a virtual course, present certain difficulties. Please let me know if you are having any problems.

The Application Project requires you to propose and discuss a possible application of social epistemology to information science.

A few Short Assignments will be assigned during the course of the semester.

Further details about these assignments (including due dates) will be provided in D2L. All assignments must be submitted as HTML or PDF files. Information about creating HTML documents is available at: http://sirls.arizona.edu/resources/computing#html.

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

Further details about turning in assignments will be posted in D2L.

Incompletes

The 1997-8 University of Arizona General Academic Manual, p.23 reads:

The grade of I may be awarded only at the end of a semester, when all but a minor portion of the course work has been satisfactorily completed. The grade of I is not to be awarded when the student is expected to repeat the course; in such a case the grade of E must be assigned. Students should make arrangements with the instructor to receive an incompete grade before the end of the semester...

If the incomplete is not removed by the instructor within one year the I grade will revert to a failing grade.

GRADING:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th>Overall Percentage Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90% and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80% to 89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70% to 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60% to 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>59% and below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each assignment will be graded on a point system. For example, you might receive 17 out of a possible 20 points on your Individual Project. At the end of the course, the points received on each of the five components will be aggregated (using the percentages given above under Course Requirements) to yield an overall percentage score. Students with scores of 90% and above will receive an A, those with scores between 80% and 89% will receive a B, those with scores between 70% and 79% will receive a C, etc. Further details about the grading of assignments will be posted in D2L.

INSTRUCTOR NAME AND CONTACT ADDRESSES:

http://tech.sbs.arizona.edu/fallis617
Office: SIRLS 14  
Office Hours: Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:30.  
Telephone: 621-3565  
D2L email: fallis at d2l dot arizona dot edu  
Regular email: fallis at email dot arizona dot edu  

If you have questions for me about the course, post a message to the D2L discussion forums or send a message to my D2L email account. (I prefer that you not use my regular email account for questions about the course.) In addition, if you are going to be in Tucson, you can come to my office hours or set up an appointment.
- IRLS575 User Interface and Web Site Design
- IRLS588-011 History of the Book
- IRLS608 Planning and Evaluation of Libraries and Information Centers
- IRLS617-010 Social Epistemology and Information Science
- IRLS671 Introduction to Digital Collections
- IRLS675 Advanced Digital Collections
- IRLS696E Human Rights to Information

- **Summer 09**
- **Spring 09**
- **Winter 08 09**
- **Fall 08**
- **Archive of Old Syllabi**

- **Schedules**
- **Core Courses**
- **Course Delivery Options**
- **Course Descriptions**
- **Distributed Electives**
- **Individual Studies: Internships, Independent Studies & Practica**
- **Registration**
- **Required first course: IRLS504**
- **Suggested Courses by Specialization**
- **Suggested Out of Department Courses**
- **Workload**

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**Guided exploration**

Click a term to initiate a search.

**Audience**
- **for Students** (92)
- **for Faculty** (28)
- **for Alums** (24)
- **for Staff** (17)
- **for Prospective Students** (7)
- more...

**Course**
- IRLS417 (2)
- IRLS418 (1)
- IRLS432 (1)
- IRLS470 (2)
- IRLS488 (6)
- more...

**People**
- **Adjunct Faculty** (152)
- **Faculty** (150)
- **Staff** (17)
- **Friends** (6)

**Semester**
Related categories

Course: IRLS617
People: Faculty » Fallis
Semester: Fall 09

Guided keyword

Search More options

School of Information Resources & Library Science, The University of Arizona, 1515 East First Street, Tucson, AZ 85719 U.S.A. Tel: (520) 621-3565 E-mail: sirls@email.arizona.edu

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