

Syllabus

GENERAL INFORMATION

Course number: MCM 330.01

Course title: Information Analysis

Credit hours: 3

Semester/year: Fall 2009

Class times: ONLINE

Instructor: Ruth Massingill

Office: Evans 304

Office hours: TT 10-11 a.m.; 1-2 p.m.; others by appointment.

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Email: rmassingill@shsu.edu

(But please use the Ask/Answer questions in BlackBoard first!)

Online messages will be answered as quickly as possible. I check for questions at least twice a day on weekdays and at least once over the weekend. If there is an emergency and I must be offline for longer than a day, I will send an email to everyone.

TEXTS

Behind the Message: Information Strategies for Communicators by Hansen and Paul
AND

Math Tools for Journalists by Wickham

You will need to purchase and read the texts. Test material will be taken from the readings, course notes and online forum discussions.

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

This class summarizes and offers practical strategies for gathering, interpreting and presenting data related to the practice of journalism and media research. Students will be introduced to information-gathering methods including direct interviewing, questioning techniques, electronic document retrieval and manipulation, database management and Internet skills. Prerequisite: MCM 132. Credit 3.

PURPOSE

This class is a core course for all mass communication students and is designed to provide a foundation for more specialized and advanced courses. In a world where there

is an overwhelming amount of information—much of it questionable—everyone needs to be able to quickly locate credible information. Once the "diamonds" are separated from the "trash," one needs to be able to critically analyze the data collected so it can be used to solve problems and answer questions.

Finally, presenting information takes many forms and requires correct attribution to avoid that ever-present danger of plagiarism, which is simply using someone else's ideas without giving proper credit. People who work in communications are always under scrutiny and must be very careful to follow the conventions of information gathering and presentation. Jobs have been lost and careers ruined due to careless mistakes. This course will help you deal more efficiently with the wealth of information that is available, show you how to collect original, or primary, material and give you techniques for using that information in practical ways.

OBJECTIVES

Since you must fully understand the situation before you can begin to solve a problem, the principal goal for this class is

1) Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.

That includes:

- Learning to define the problem by developing goals and research questions
- Going "beyond Google" to find diverse sources of secondary information
- Selecting credible information
- Locating primary sources to provide a variety of viewpoints

Once information is collected, the next step is

(A) Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments and points of view, including:

- Evaluating polls and statistics
- Understanding how to fairly present numbers such as percentages without bias
- Looking for trends and patterns that help you predict what may happen (such as job trends)

Along the way, you'll be

(B) Learning specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in your career field, including:

- Knowing the difference between qualitative and quantitative information
- Building strong interviewing skills
- Learning how to properly attribute information, both formally (using MLA) and journalistic style
- Practicing your skills in organizing information and writing clearly
- Using quotes effectively

A bonus in this class is that your research efforts will focus on your chosen career area, so you will finish the semester with a "blueprint" for how to reach your career goals; you will have made some useful contacts (some people find internships through these

assignments); and you will have reinforced your career choice (or adjusted it to fit your interests and abilities).

TIME REQUIREMENTS

Doing well in online courses requires a determined commitment of your time, strong organizational and problem-solving skills, and the use of personal initiative.

You will be required to meet all deadlines for your work to be graded and included in your point total for the semester.

EQUIPMENT

Computers and software needed for this course are provided in SHSU labs. You may use other computers, but software may not be compatible. You can store your work on both the server in the lab and the university server, but you may also wish to purchase a USB Mass Storage Compliant flash drive to back up your work.

FORMAT FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments must be submitted EXACTLY as instructed in the assignment criteria. NO MicroSoft Word attachments will be accepted or graded.

GRADING

Course grades will be based on a 500-point scale, which will include online discussion postings, research and writing projects, and quizzes. Work will be divided into five modules.

Specifically, points will be accumulated as follows:

- 1) 10 discussion board postings @ 10 pts each: 100 possible points. (20%)
- 2) 1 homepage assignment @ 25 pts. (5%)
- 3) 4 quizzes @ 25 pts each: 100 possible points. (20%)
- 4) Final @ 50 points (10%)
- 4) 3 individual projects @ 75 pts each: 225 possible points. (45%)

Complete descriptions and grading criteria will be provided in Blackboard for each assignment.

Blackboard may show a grade percentage; this is not correct! Grades for this class are based only on total points earned as shown on the grade scale below.

Ultimately, letter grades must be assigned to evaluations of course work. Under the definitions established by Sam Houston State University, students who receive the following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for communication courses may be interpreted this way:

A= Excellent

B= Well above average

C= Average

D= Barely passing

F= Failure

Grading throughout the semester; however, is conducted on a point scale. The combined value of all assignments is 500 points. Points are added or subtracted from that according to standards described in this syllabus. In this class you will accumulate points toward a final grade. There will be no percentage weighting of assignments. The grade in the course will be determined using the following scale:

500 - 450 pts = A
449 - 400 pts = B
399 - 350 pts = C
349 - 300 pts = D
less than 300 = F

All grades will be posted on the Blackboard Class page and may be accessed by the student at any point during the semester. A final class grade will not be released over the phone or the internet. However, students may determine their final class grades by comparing the totals to the scale above.

Students who cannot complete the course requirements due to illness or any other unforeseen issue may apply for an X in the course. To apply for the incomplete, the student must submit in writing to the instructor a documented explanation. The request will be submitted to the dean of CHSS for a final decision.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Ethics are the cornerstone of responsible communication. Honesty is expected--and demanded--of all students. Violations of professional ethical standards have led to an automatic "F" in the course. All work in this class must be original work. No work that a student has already published or is in the process of publishing is considered original work. No work a student has used to meet requirements in a previous class is considered original work.

The University expects students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. Furthermore, the University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work that is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Students found guilty of dishonest behavior in this class will be asked to leave the class and will be given the grade of F for the entire course.

Plagiarized assignments will not be accepted. For the sake of clarity, plagiarism is defined below:

Plagiarism occurs when one person claims credit for another person's work. It is a form of intellectual dishonesty that is treated with great severity by professionals and by the university. Students are encouraged to review the university's policy on plagiarism. Students should be certain they understand the meaning of plagiarism: a paper using quotes without quotation marks and attribution is plagiarized. But plagiarism is more than unrecognized quotes. Conclusions that are not the student's, information that is not common knowledge, and specific facts must be attributed: tell who said it and cite or footnote it, even if this information is not a direct quote. Dates are important, especially as on-line information is becoming more common.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Q-DROPS

Students are allowed no more than five Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of five Q-drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses to grant permission to drop the class, the student will be required to remain in the class.

The Q-drop limit took effect with the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall 2004 semester will not be included in the five Q-drop limit. Neither will Q-drops from other universities.

NOTE: A Q-drop is a drop made after the last day for tuition refunds (12th class day for fall/spring; 4th class day for summer) but before the date for which a drop would result in a grade of 'F' - as published in the Academic Calendar.

CLASS EVALUATION

You will be asked to complete an online evaluation of this class and the instructor toward the end of the semester using the IDEA system. These evaluations are taken very seriously by SHSU administrators and faculty, so please take time to provide your thoughtful feedback.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I know what is happening in the class?

It is your responsibility to check Blackboard regularly (at least every other day) for announcements. Individual emails will not be sent once the class is underway; the announcements tab in BB is where updated info and reminders will be posted.

Where do I begin?

First, read the syllabus carefully. Then look under the Intro Module 1 in Blackboard to get started. Each module includes an outline of important information, a list of assignments for that portion of the course and resources to help you successfully complete the module. When the assignments have been completed, you will take a quiz over the module material.

If I still have questions about an assignment, how do I ask a question?

After reading the syllabus and carefully reviewing all resources available for an assignment, if you still have questions and would like to contact the instructor, go to the Ask/Answer Questions area in Blackboard (last button on the left on the main page for this class). There you will see a number of places to ask questions. One place is called Module #1 Questions, another is for Module #2, etc. Click on Add New Thread. On the screen that appears, after Subject, type your name, last name first, first initial of your first name. Then type your question in the area provided and click Submit. Between Monday and Friday, the instructor will make every effort to post an answer within 24 hours. The instructor may not always be available during the weekends.

Others who may have a similar question about that particular assignment can see your question and can see the teacher's response. If you have a question about an assignment, please read the responses to other students' questions to see if your question has already been answered. **DO NOT** post the same question; it will not be answered a second time!

If anyone still needs individual help after submitting a question in the forum, it is possible to schedule a conference with the instructor in her office.

When are assignments due?

Due dates are included in each module and on the course schedule. It is a good idea to put those dates in your planner since projects are time-consuming.

How are assignments submitted?

Specific directions are provided with each assignment and should be followed precisely to obtain a favorable grade.

How are my grades on assignments determined?

A list of grading criteria is provided with each assignment.

What happens if I miss a deadline for an assignment?

There will be a point deduction of 10% of total points for that assignment for each day it is submitted after the due date. NO late assignments will be accepted for grading after the last day of class (see schedule).

What if there are technical problems (like the SHSU internet going down)?

Allowances will be made if such difficulties arise (and they do at some point in every semester it seems!) Typically, the instructor will extend the deadline so assignments can be submitted without penalty.

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Item Tentative Course Schedule

Intro: Module 1 (see assignment folder in module for readings and complete description of assignments)

Week 1 (Aug. 24)

Homepage assignment -Due noon, Friday, Aug. 28

Week 2 (Aug. 31)

Forum #1: Due noon, Wednesday, Sept. 2

Quiz #1: Opens 8 a.m. Friday, Sept. 4 (Due by 5 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 6)

Monday, Sept. 7: Labor Day holiday!

Module 2 (see module for detailed descriptions)

Week 3 (Sept. 6)

Forum #2: Due noon, Wednesday, Sept. 9

Week 4 (Sept. 14)

Forum #3: Due noon, Wednesday, Sept. 16

Week 5 (Sept. 21)
Forum #4: Due noon, Wednesday, Sept. 23

Week 6 (Sept. 28)
Project 1: Due noon, Friday, Oct. 2

Module 3

Week 7 (Oct. 5)
Quiz 2: Opens 8 a.m. Friday, Oct. 2 (Due by 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 6)
Forum #5: Due noon, Wednesday, Oct. 7

Week 8 (Oct. 12)
Forum #6: Due noon, Wednesday, Oct. 14

Week 9 (Oct. 19)
Get Real event (meet your classmates in real time) Tentative date: Wednesday, Oct. 21.

Week 10 (Oct. 26)
Forum #7: Due noon, Wednesday, Oct. 28
Project 2: Due noon, Friday, Oct. 30

Module 4

Week 11 (Nov. 2)
Quiz 3: Opens 8 a.m. Monday, Nov. 2 (Due by 5 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4)

Week 12 (Nov. 9)
Forum #8: Due noon, Wednesday, Nov. 11

Week 13 (Nov. 16)
Forum #9: Due noon, Wednesday, Nov. 18

Week 14 (Nov. 23)

Thanksgiving holidays Nov. 25-27!

Week 15 (Nov. 23)
Project 3: Due noon, Friday, Dec 4

Wrapup: Module 5

Week 16 (Dec. 7)
Quiz 4: Opens 8 a.m. Monday, Dec. 7 (Due by 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9)
Forum #10: Due noon, Wednesday, Dec. 9

Week 17 (Dec. 14)

Final: Opens Monday, Dec. 14 (Due by 5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 16)