School of Library and Information Science

University of Kentucky

LIS 608: Research Methods in Library & Information Science

Spring 2014

January 14-May 5

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Office Hours: Wed. 10-2 & by appointment

INTRODUCTION

LIS 608, Research Methodology in LIS, focuses on common social science techniques, such as surveys and experiments, which lend themselves to quantitative analysis. Also included are lectures on qualitative methods, such as participant observation and historical research, and hybrid methods like focus groups, content analysis, and evaluation research. Studies of information usage are used as the main examples, and methods peculiar to information science, such as bibliometrics, are also examined.

Student learning outcomes—upon completion of the course students will be able to:

- Critically evaluate and apply core principles and theories of library and information science (e.g. the role of information agencies in a democratic and pluralistic society).
- Define core ethical principles and describe how they should apply them to the practice of library and information science both as individuals and as part of the collective.
- Experiment with appropriate technologies and tools to be prepared to implement them in a variety of information environments.
- Interpret and evaluate research.
- Apply research to the analysis of professional problems.
- Describe how empirical research advances the knowledge base and practice of library and information science.
- Communicate effectively in writing.
- Apply critical thinking to solve professional problems.
One text is required for the course:


Other required readings can be found in academic libraries or through the UK library web site. Some are freely available on the Internet, and links are provided below for most of those. As this is a research course, you are expected to find the rest!

**Structure of the course:** The class weeks will run Wednesday to Tuesday. Almost every week you will do some kind of assignment, whether it is an article review, an application of a method, or work toward your final project. You are expected to do all assigned readings and to view all lecture materials, whether it is delivered as video or notes. Everything will be held in Blackboard. We will have a few guest lecturers this semester, and these may be held live with the option to attend synchronously (any synchronous meeting will be recorded and stored in Blackboard).

(I strongly advise that you type and save anything to be posted in a BB discussion forum into a word processing document first.)

**Contact Information:** I am most accessible through email: melissa.adler@uky.edu. As a general rule, I will respond to course-related email correspondence within 24 hours. Please include the course number in brackets [608] in the subject line for all messages. I am happy to meet face to face or via technology with students, but you should set up the appointment in advance via email.

Please note that class communication is done via your official UK email address. You must check this frequently.

**Technological requirements:** To test your browser’s compatibility with Blackboard, please visit [http://wiki.uky.edu/blackboard/Wiki%20Pages/Browser%20Eye%20Chart.aspx](http://wiki.uky.edu/blackboard/Wiki%20Pages/Browser%20Eye%20Chart.aspx)

All students should have access to a computer with a secure Internet connection, Adobe Acrobat Reader, and word processing software that allows them to save files as .DOCX, preferably, but also .doc, .odt, or .rtf files. I cannot view .pages files, so Mac users will need to save their assignments in a different format. Microsoft Office and other software is available from [https://download.uky.edu/](https://download.uky.edu/). For more on technical requirements, visit the Distance Learning web site’s Technical Requirements and Recommendations. Please let me know when you are having technical issues first. For more assistance, contact the following:

Information Technology Customer Service Center (UKIT): 859-257-1300
Help Desk: 218-HELP (4357)
Distance Learning Programs Office: 257-3377
Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning: 257-8272
FERPA and Privacy: As a student, your educational records are considered confidential. Under FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), your records are confidential and protected. Under most circumstances your records will not be released without your written and signed consent. However, some directory information may be released to third parties without your prior consent unless a written request to restrict this is on file. You can learn more about student rights to privacy at http://www.uky.edu/registrar/FERPA-privacy.

Academic Accommodations: If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible. In order to receive accommodations in this course, you must provide me with a Letter of Accommodation from the Disability Resource Center (Room 2, Alumni Gym, 257-2754, jkarnes@uky.edu) for coordination of campus disability services available to students with disabilities. We can then collaborate on the best solution.

Academic Integrity, Cheating and Plagiarism: You are expected to submit your own original work for all assignments in this course. See the home page for the Office of Academic Ombud Services (http://www.uky.edu/Ombud) for a definition of plagiarism, how to avoid plagiarism and UK’s new academic offense policy. Please refer to Student Rights and Responsibilities, Part II, Section 6.3 (http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html) for UK’s policy on academic integrity.

Classroom Behavior, Decorum and Civility: Please be respectful to others in the class and engage in civil discourse when we discuss topics that have a diversity of perspectives. Please help me maintain the most courteous environment by using a little peer pressure if necessary.

General Course Policies: Policies concerning academic integrity, excused absences and academic accommodations due to disability are available online at: http://cis.uky.edu/lis/sites/default/files/policies.pdf

Integration of the syllabus with the themes of diversity, assessment, and technology: All UK professional education programs address and affirm the value of diversity in education, the use of technology to support all aspects of instructional programming, and the importance of attaining high levels of skill in assessing the outcomes of instruction. This course provides students an opportunity to demonstrate attention to these themes and reflect on the mechanisms that this course has provided to demonstrate improved skills in these areas.

Military Members and Veterans
We recognize the complexities of being a member of the military community and also a student. If you are a member of the military or a military veteran or dependent, please inform your instructor if you are in need of special accommodations. Drill schedules, calls to active duty, mandatory training exercises, complications with GI Bill disbursement, and other unforeseen military and veteran related developments can complicate your academic life. If you are aware of a complication, we will work with you and put you in contact with university
staff members who are trained to assist you. Please contact the Coordinator of the University of Kentucky Veterans Resource Center at (859) 257-1148 for additional assistance. Visit http://www.uky.edu/veterans for more available resources.

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**GRADING**

*Grading* for the entire course will be based on:

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**Grading Scale:**

[92% – 100%] = A *(Exceptional Achievement)*

[82% – 91%] = B *(High Achievement)*

[70% – 81%] = C *(Average Achievement)*

[0% – 69%] = F *(Failing)*

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**ASSIGNMENTS**

As a rule, I am happy to look at drafts before you turn in a finished assignment, as long as you give me enough time (I suggest 4 days, minimum) to review it and provide feedback in time for you to incorporate that feedback.

Assignments are always due at 11:59 pm on the day indicated.

**ARTICLE REVIEW/DISCUSSION LEADER (10 points)**

You will each select one of the starred articles in the course schedule to review, and then you will lead a discussion on that topic for the week.

- You will post a review of the article to the discussion board by Friday of that week at 11:59 pm. This gives your classmates the weekend and Monday and Tuesday to respond.
• Provide at least two questions for discussion.
• Your classmates will respond to your post, and you will direct the ongoing discussion throughout the rest of the week (respond at least three times).

The issues covered by the reviews will vary, according to topic, method, and your own lens through which you choose to analyze the article, but some things to consider are the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

• What is/are the central research question(s)?
• What research method has been used? Is the method appropriate?
• What is the argument/thesis of the article?
• Is there a theoretical component?
• What is the intended audience?
• How does it inform library/knowledge work practice or research?
• Is something being measured? If so, how? What is the unit of measurement?
• Does the author explain the methodology effectively?
• What type of sample is used, and how are participants selected?
• How are data collected? How are they analyzed?
• Are there limitations of the research design? Unanswered questions? Holes?
• What are the strengths of the paper?
• What might be some further research questions that could spring from this article?
• What credentials or interests does the author(s) have? Might the author have biases?

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OBSERVATION (Due end of week 8, 10 points)

The purpose of this assignment is to give you experience in observing behavior and recording your observations. You have two different options for this assignment: A) observe people in a library setting, OR B) observe a person searching for information online (a library website, a digital library, library databases, a corporate website).

You will post your observation assignment to the discussion board for that week. You are also expected to comment on at least two classmates’ observations.

*Please refrain from posting any identifying information about individuals or about libraries. You may specify the size and type of the library, as well as the size of the community it serves, but please try to avoid naming the library or people.*

This and the survey/interview assignment may inform or apply to your Research Proposal assignment. Bear this in mind as you select your sites and subjects.
A) Library.

The basic steps are these:

1. Read Kawulick, "Participant observation as a data collection method."

2. Find a library setting in which these conditions apply: a. you have access (i.e., you can legally be there without difficulty); b. there is an unobtrusive place and for you to sit; c. you will not disrupt or interfere with the work of others; d. you have a clear field of view (you can see without twisting and turning or looking around an obstruction); and e. where there is a flow of people and work. Some possible settings are:

Reference desk or circulation desk areas -- periodical or reserve reading areas -- an area for online catalog terminals or Internet computers – children’s departments – etc.

3. Pick a half-hour time period (a full 30 minutes) and sit there. Watch carefully what happens around you. Take notes, and mark times at which you make observations. E.g., “6:03. Tall man & small boy--> reference desk”. Do not be so obvious about your observations that people feel that they are being watched. Make systematic observations about what you see. Try to look at the scene as a stranger -- someone who has arrived from a distant place and has never seen this situation before. I can’t tell you exactly what to note (that is part of your task), but here are a few suggestions to get you started:

How many people pass through your field of view? What is the rate of flow -- is it a "busy" place? How would you describe the majority of people who pass by? What kinds of interactions take place? Describe individual eye and body movements, and vocalizations: conversations with others, or "talking out loud" to oneself. What kinds of roles do people play? Try to avoid preconceptions and common labels: Don’t use titles (e.g., "librarian" and “patron”) to describe roles, but rather describe what behaviors you see. What observable expressions are evoked in those people you see, e.g., satisfaction, frustration, happiness, etc.? Do you think people know or suspect that you are observing them? Finally, might there be a practical application of your study? E.g., Could the space or the service offered where you observed be improved to better serve the clients of that library?

4. This is the hard part! Write a narrative that conveys the experience that you had (or reports the results of your observations). It is OK to be creative in your style, as long as you don’t distort what actually happened. Indicate, either in the margin or in the text, the times that events happened; you may find the reporting easier if you begin each entry or paragraph with a time reference

(e.g., “5:02 - 5:05: A group of three women stop at a desk across from the front door. A man and a woman sit behind the desk. The man greets the three women…”).
5. Note the requirements of Assignment 3, and pay attention to anything that brings further questions to mind.

B) Online searching. You will ask a question (or series of questions), the answers to which will be found by using an online resource (a library website, a digital library, library databases, a corporate website).

1. Read Kawulick, "Participant observation as a data collection method."

2. Be sure that you choose a space that allows you to observe a person’s search behavior. Make sure you get the person’s permission!

3. Choose a specific site, database, or set of online resources for the participant to search.

4. Write two or three questions that will require a fair amount of searching. You will be less concerned about whether they arrive at an answer than you will be with their process. How do they go about looking for information? Expect to spend at least 15 minutes observing the person’s behavior.

Things to think about when you design your questions:

- They shouldn’t be so far afield that the person does not have very basic background knowledge of. They should be somewhat familiar with the terminologies and concepts.
- At the same time, you’ll want to avoid asking questions about common knowledge that can very easily be found.
- There should be enough complexity and difficulty so that it takes a while to arrive at results or answers.
- Open-ended questions, rather than questions with answers will probably be most fruitful, as they don’t necessarily have to be finite.

Sample questions (you can use these questions or make up your own based on your own research interests):

*You are doing a research paper on metaphors in Shakespeare. Search the library article databases for at least five good articles that you could use as sources.
*You are thinking of creating a web page featuring pictures from UK’s digital library to showcase Kentucky in the Civil War. Find at least 7 images.

5. As you observe, write down every click, every choice that the person makes. If the person speaks, record their comments. Describe eye and body movements. Make systematic observations about what you see.

6. Be sure not to guide the person as they are doing their search! It can be tempting to step in
and offer help, but resist that urge. You can ask questions like “why did you select that?” but try to avoid any remarks that might influence their behavior.

7. Write a narrative that conveys the experience that you had (or reports the results of your observations). It is OK to be creative in your style, as long as you don’t distort what actually happened.

8. Note the requirements of Assignment 3, and pay attention to anything that brings further questions to mind.

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SURVEY or INTERVIEW RESEARCH DESIGN (10 points)

This assignment builds upon the observation you just completed. Your observations should have brought up questions that a researcher might want to dig into. Develop an observation into a research question and compose a survey or a set of interview questions.

You will post your observation assignment to the discussion board for that week. You are also expected to comment on at least two classmates’ observations. (Again, I strongly advise that you type it all into a word document and save it before posting to BB.)

If you create a survey:

- Compose at least 10 discrete questions (i.e., screening and contingent questions don’t count towards the total, although it is fine to include them). Do not simply create one question with 10 sub-parts using the same scale, but rather vary the types of questions and answers.
- Use a scale or multiple-choice format for as many items as possible. A few open-ended questions are acceptable, if they are related to your other questions.
- Format the questions in ways that encourage understanding and completion of the questionnaire. Guard against possible misinterpretations of questions or instructions by the respondent: use clear, non-biased and (where possible) simple language.
- Include a statement explaining the survey’s purpose and encouraging a response. (This is an atypical venue for distributing survey questions, so there are formalities that are not required.)
- Explain to whom you would send this to and how it would be distributed (mail, online survey disseminated through email/social networks/library web site, etc.). How would you choose your sample? What kind of sample would you use?
- Optional: Compose the survey in a web form (Survey Monkey, Google Drive, etc.) and provide the link.

If you create interview questions:
• Indicate whether the interview will be structured or semi-structured, and why you've chosen this approach.
• Provide 7-10 interview questions, paying attention to wording and delivery. Be sure to avoid influencing responses through the questions.
• Include a statement explaining the interview's purpose and encouraging participation.
• How many people would you interview, and how would you recruit them? How would you choose your sample?

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The major assignment for this class is a research proposal. We will do this in stages, beginning with an identification of your topic and research question(s). You will also conduct a literature review before submitting the final proposal.

1) Research topic and research questions (Due end of week 4, 5 points)
2) Literature Review (Due end of week 10, 15 points)
3) Final proposal (Due MAY 5, 30 points)

Research Topic: The topic is up to you, but it should be original and not based on earlier work for which you have received credit. The topic may be academic or practical. It should contribute something new to the existing literature. Case studies on individual libraries are acceptable if they provide compelling evidence for adopting or changing library policies and/or practices.

Literature Review: You will do a thorough review of the literature that is relevant to your research topic. You will want to find theories and/or models that can inform your study, as well. Conducting this review will help you to develop and focus your research questions. As you are writing, be sure to foreground your own work and bring the literature into conversation around your study. This will be 6-10 double-spaced pages, depending on the number of relevant sources. Some topics have been widely studied, but there may be a dearth of information on other topics. Where there is a lack of literature, you may find that exploring other disciplines (education, sociology, etc.) have a body of literature on the topic. Where there is an abundance of literature, be sure to ask yourself whether your study contributes something new.

Final Research Proposal: Your research proposal should be 20-25 pages, double spaced, plus references.

It should include the following components:

1. A statement of the topic, phrased as a research question.
2. A statement of purpose. If appropriate, an explanation of your own credentials or interest in
The proposal should be formatted according to an appropriate citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago). I don’t have a preference. Just be consistent!

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PARTICIPATION (20 points): Your participation grade will be based on how engaged you are within the discussion boards. My hope is that we have a vibrant, ongoing conversation. Each week you are required to respond to each discussion leader’s question. Some weeks there will be no discussion leader, and others there are two. Most weeks I will post at least one question, as well. These will be posted by Wednesday. It is your responsibility to monitor the boards every week and participate in every discussion topic with at least 100 words each. I will post discussion grades at quarterly intervals (Weeks 4, 8, 12, 15) during the semester (5 points each).

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COURSE SCHEDULE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>January 14</th>
<th>Intro to research</th>
<th>Creswell, Chapter 1</th>
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Furner, J. “Fundamental Research Questions in Information Science,” ASIS&T 2011: 74th Annual Meeting of the American
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<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>January 21</th>
<th>Theory</th>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>January 28</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
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<td>UNC Literature review handouts, <a href="http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/">http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/</a></td>
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|        |            |        | (Optional) NC State University Writing and Speaking Tutorial Service Tutors “Writing A Literature Review and Using a
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<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
<th>Creswell, Chapter 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>February 4</td>
<td>Research topic due February 10.</td>
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<td>*Harris, M. The psychology of torture: The Milgram experiments showed that anybody could be capable of torture when obeying an authority. Are they still valid? aeon, (Oct. 7, 2014) [<a href="http://aeon.co/magazine/psychology/why-do-we-keep-repeating-the-milgram-experiments/">http://aeon.co/magazine/psychology/why-do-we-keep-repeating-the-milgram-experiments/</a>]</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 5</th>
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<td>Web Usability Study 2013, UK (Available in BB)</td>
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<td>[Guest lecture— Edward G. Brown, Director of Web Development, University of Kentucky Libraries]</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Qualitative methods</th>
<th>Creswell, Chapters 7 (pp. 139-142), 9</th>
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<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Data Collection: Observation, Ethnography</th>
<th>View Usability video (available in Blackboard)</th>
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| Week 8  
| --- | --- | --- |
| Week 9  
March 11-24  
[http://crl.acrl.org/content/69/6/510.full.pdf+html](http://crl.acrl.org/content/69/6/510.full.pdf+html)  
| Interview / Survey questions due March 24 |  |  
C. Sean Burns, Auto-ethnography field notes:  
[http://www.cseanburns.net/journal/blog/categories/lq-autoethno-field-notes/](http://www.cseanburns.net/journal/blog/categories/lq-autoethno-field-notes/)  
[Guest lecture: C. Sean Burns, Assistant Professor, SLIS] |
| Week 10  
March 25 | Data Analysis: Content, discourse, historical, textual, visual |  |
| Literature review due March 31 |  |  
*Charmaz, K. (2006) Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis, Sage, Chapters 1 and 3, pp. 1-
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**Final research proposal due May 5** |