

INSC 525: Information Architecture — Fall 2022

School of Information Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Syllabus [version 1.0](#) – Updated July 27, 2022

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COURSE INFORMATION

Tuesdays 6:30-9:10 p.m. Eastern

Zoom: <https://tennessee.zoom.us/j/95523379944>

Canvas: <https://utk.instructure.com/courses/156830/>

Welcome! Let's talk about the internet

Information architecture is a critical and underappreciated component of successful digital design. In this course we will cover fundamentals of information architecture for web and mobile apps and get a better understanding of the day-to-day implementation of information architecture, user research, and content design. My philosophy is that we all learn together. This is only my second semester teaching at SIS and I will be learning with you.

Instructor: Erin White

- **Pronouns:** they/them/theirs ([what's this?](#))
- **Please call me:** Erin, Professor White, Mx. White
- **Please *don't* call me:** Dr. White, ma'am, sir, Ms. White, Mr. White
- **Email:** ewhite66@utk.edu
- **About me:** [My UTK web profile](#)
- **Chat with me:** by appointment via Zoom or phone



2022 context

I recognize we are still in the midst of global pandemics that are impacting everyone's lives. My focus is on helping you get the most out of this learning experience while being able to manage everything else in your life. If you're experiencing difficulty with any part of the course, or need an alternative arrangement, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. This course shouldn't be an impediment to your well-being, but a helpful building block for your career.

Course evaluation

I encourage your comments throughout the semester. I'll send out an anonymous evaluation at midterm to check in on how the course is going for you. You will also be invited to formally evaluate the course at the end of the term. Please participate in this valuable process!

Catalog description

“INSC 525: Introduces fundamental concepts, methods, and practices in information architecture for virtual space. Focuses on organization, navigation, labeling, and searching of Web sites and intranets, as well as user experience.”

Student learning outcomes

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- explain the main concepts of web information architecture
- understand the basic principles of user and context research
- explain web best practices based on the principles of information architecture
- evaluate websites based on the principles of information architecture using professional terminology
- analyze the nature and use of labeling systems, including the role of controlled vocabularies and metadata, in structuring information content
- design/redesign website navigation systems using various techniques
- use diagramming software tools to communicate information design ideas
- analyze emerging trends and ethical issues in web design and architecture
- analyze the evolving role of diverse user groups and user behaviors in structuring shared information spaces

Course Design

The course is delivered synchronously over Zoom, and includes a mix of lecture, activities, guest presentations, and discussion. There are readings each week. There is a semesterlong individual project that involves diagramming and researching an existing website or app’s information architecture; this project builds on skills we cover over the course of the semester. There are also a few individual reflection assignments.

Text: “The Polar Bear Book” (PBB)

Morville, P., Rosenfeld, L, and Arango, J. (2015). *Information architecture: For the Web and beyond*. Sebastopol, Calif.: O’Reilly. ISBN: 978-1491911686

This book is not required but I recommend purchasing it. I will be reviewing key parts of the content during lectures. However, if you learn best by reading a text, or are unfamiliar with web design, I recommend buying the book.

Readings on Canvas

Other class readings will be available on the Canvas course site, downloadable or hyperlinked from each class module.

COMMUNICATION

Email

I am required to communicate with you through your UTK email address. If you prefer to use another address, consult the [OIT Helpdesk](#) to obtain directions for forwarding your UTK mail to your preferred address if you don't wish to check both accounts.

Instructor Availability

Don't hesitate to email me with questions or concerns. This is my second job; I work full-time Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., so **my email responses will likely arrive outside of business hours**. I respond within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend. I'm happy to schedule a call with you via Zoom or phone, too.

ASSIGNMENTS, DUE DATES, AND MSIS PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Most assignments are due **the night before class** (Mondays at 11:59 p.m. EST).

Assignment	Points	Due date	Program outcome
Intro survey	10	Aug. 31	-
Information architecture project			
<i>Required elements – 60 points</i>			
● Site selection + eval and your work plan	10	Sept. 12	1, 8
● Site navigation diagram	15	Oct. 3	6, 9
● Site wireframes	15	Oct. 17	6, 9
● Critical friends	10	In class Nov. 8	4, 8
● Present findings to class	10	In class Nov. 29 or Dec. 6	1, 2
<i>Optional elements – choose ±20 points</i>			
● Interview with an information architect	10	By Nov. 14	2, 4, 9
● Redesign site navigation	10	By Nov. 14	6, 7, 8, 9
● Redesign site wireframes	10	By Nov. 14	6, 7, 8, 9
● Define 3 site content types	10	By Nov. 14	6, 7, 8
In-class article summary (<i>optional, repeatable</i>)	5	varies	9
Reflection paper	10	Dec. 9	5, 7

MSIS Program Outcomes

It is our vision to provide a quality educational program, and for students to have the very best educational experience possible. By the end of their time in the MSIS program, each student should be able to:

1. Describe and discuss the processes of creation, organization, distribution, storage, access, retrieval, management, use, and preservation of information.
2. Describe and discuss the nature of leadership and management in the information professions and the importance of participation in the global information society.
3. Apply the general principles, values, and ethical standards of providing information services in a variety of settings and for diverse populations.
4. Comply with the changing responsibilities of the information professional in a culturally diverse and networked global society.
5. Identify critical professional issues in a variety of organizational, cultural, societal, disciplinary, transdisciplinary, and historical contexts.
6. Analyze and apply standards or policies related to the processes of creation, organization, distribution, storage, access, retrieval, management, use or preservation of information.
7. Explain the changing nature of information, information needs, and information behavior.
8. Assess and implement information technologies, systems, sources, and services that serve users effectively and efficiently.
9. Analyze research and apply it to information practice.

Assignment overview

Introductory survey (10 points)

Please complete the Getting to Know You survey in Canvas to help me get to know you better, identify areas you'd like to learn about more, and find ways that we can best collaborate this semester.

Optional: In-class article summary presentation (repeatable, 5 points)

Most class weeks, there are a few articles to read. Not everyone will be able to read everything! Each week I will give the opportunity to sign up to give a 5- to 10-minute summary and brief discussion on an article from the next week's readings during the next week's class. This is a repeatable credit.

Information architecture project (up to 80 points)

In this semesterlong project, you will research, analyze and design or redesign the information architecture of a website or app. This project has **5 required components**, and you may **choose 2 (or more) optional components**. This is an individual project, but if you'd prefer to work in a group, this can be a group project. *Full descriptions of each assignment are available on Canvas.*

Final reflection paper (10 points)

Reflect on what you learned this term (1-3 pages). This reflection is mostly for you as a way to capture things you have learned and ideas you wish to take with you after this semester.

COURSE CALENDAR

Fullest and most up-to-date course calendar is available in each week's module in Canvas. Please [check the Canvas module for each week](#) to find the readings. **PBB = our textbook, the Polar Bear Book.**

Date	Topic	Due
Aug. 30	Welcome to class + IA overview Please read: PBB chapters 1, 2	
Sept. 6	Anatomy and fundamentals of IA Please read: PBB chapters 3, 4, 5	<i>Getting to know you survey</i>
Sept. 13	Content and context Read: PBB chapter 11 – first half Read: Clean Content = Portable Content : Inside NPR Read: Setting IA up to fail Read: Designing for cognitive differences	9/12: <i>Site selection + evaluation and your workplan</i>
Sept. 20	User research Read: PBB chapter 11 – second half Review Gov.Uk's user research manual Skim: Usability testing for voice content Skim: UX testing during a pandemic	
Sept. 27	Design and documentation Read: PBB chapters 12, 13 Video: How to start a wireframe Read: Redesigning the Los Angeles Public Library website & app – a UX case study	
Oct. 4	Organization Read: PBB chapter 6 Read: File Not Found: A generation that grew up with Google is forcing professors to rethink their lesson plans	10/3: <i>Site navigation diagram</i>

Date	Topic	Due
	Optional deep dive: Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction Optional deep dive: Classification Along the Color Line: Excavating Racism in the Stacks	
Oct. 11	Labeling Read: PBB chapter 7 Read: Library terms that users understand Read: Your Information Architecture is an Accessibility Problem	
Oct. 18	Navigation Read: PBB chapter 8 Read: Don Norman's Principles of Interaction Design Optional read: Trans-inclusive design	10/17: Site wireframes
Oct. 25	Taxonomies, vocabularies, content types Please read: PBB chapter 10	
Nov. 1	Deceptive design patterns 🤖 Skim: darkpatterns.org Skim: Tarot cards of tech Read: How Tech Provides Platforms for Hate Read/listen: Who designs the ballots we cast?	
Nov. 8	Critical friends! SEO and searching Read: PBB chapter 9 Listen/watch: How biased are our algorithms? Listen/watch: Imagining a Future Free from the Algorithms of Oppression	<i>Critical friends</i>
Nov. 15	IA in practice Read: Interview reports from your classmates Skim: Organizing your Wordpress site with Custom Post Types, Taxonomies, and Fields Skim: Scoop: A Glimpse Into the NYTimes CMS	11/14: Optional IA project deliverables due
Nov. 22	Work day - no lecture. Use this time to finalize your project and work on your presentation.	

Date	Topic	Due
Nov. 29	Final presentations	
Dec. 6	Final presentations	
Dec. 9	<i>Final reflection paper due</i>	

COURSE ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION POLICIES

Attendance and Participation

To meet the learning outcomes for this course, you'll need to be in class and actively participate during synchronous class sessions. Your classmates will learn from you! There are many ways to participate: asking or answering questions using your microphone and/or the Group Chat; contributing to discussions in breakout rooms; bringing relevant information architecture and UX-related news from the outside world into our course; posting to the Discussions area in Canvas.

Please contact me in advance (or as soon as possible afterward) if you cannot attend a synchronous class session. I understand that you may not be able to make it to every single class for any number of reasons this fall. Absences will affect your grade insofar as they impede you from completing activities/assignments. If you're absent and I don't hear from you, I will be in touch!

If you miss class, please:

- Review modules and discussions from Canvas
- Watch the recording of the class session
- Complete any exercises conducted during the synchronous class session

ASSESSMENTS AND EVALUATIONS

Preparation of Written Work

The writing assignments for this course are not structured as academic research papers but rather as business communications. Please use [plain language](#) when possible, [follow best practices for writing for the web](#), and **cite and link to your sources** using whatever style makes sense to you — just be consistent and do not plagiarize.

Due Dates and Late Assignments

Assignments are typically due the night before class (Monday nights). Assignments should be submitted via the appropriate section of Canvas. If your assignment remains incomplete when Canvas will no longer accept submissions, send me an email to let me know, describing your progress on the assignment so we can discuss your options.

Assigning Grades

I won't assign letter grades for individual assignments, and will instead provide a point score for each assignment and qualitative comments. If you turn in the assignment, you get the points. The goal of the flexible Information architecture project and optional article summaries is for you to **have control over how many possible points you can earn in the semester** and thus your final grade.

Evaluation

Semester grades will be assigned according to the following scale set by UTK.

A	93≤	(4 quality points per semester hour) superior performance.
A-	90-92.99	(3.7 quality points per semester credit hour) intermediate grade performance.
B+	88-89.99	(3.5 quality points per semester hour) better than satisfactory performance.
B	83-87.99	(3 quality points per semester hour) satisfactory performance.
B-	80-82.99	(2.7 quality points per semester credit hour) intermediate grade performance.
C+	78-79.99	(2.5 quality points per semester hour) less than satisfactory performance.
C	70-77.99	(2 quality points per semester hour) performance well below the standard expected of graduate students.
D	60-69.99	(1 quality point per semester hour) clearly unsatisfactory performance and cannot be used to satisfy degree requirements.
F	59.99≥	(no quality points) extremely unsatisfactory performance and cannot be used to satisfy degree requirements.
I		(no quality points) a temporary grade indicating that the student has performed satisfactorily in the course but, due to unforeseen circumstances, has been unable to finish all requirements. An I is not given to enable a student to do additional work to raise a deficient grade. The instructor, in consultation with the student, decides the terms for the removal of the I, including the time limit for removal. If the I is not removed within one calendar year, the grade will be changed to an F. The course will not be counted in the cumulative grade point average until a final grade is assigned. No student may graduate with an I on the record.
S/N C		(carries credit hours, but no quality points) S is equivalent to a grade of B or better, and NC means no credit earned. A grade of Satisfactory/No Credit is allowed only where indicated in the course description in the Graduate Catalog . The number of Satisfactory/No Credit courses in a student's program is limited to one-fourth of the total credit hours required.
P/NP		(carries credit hours, but no quality points) P indicates progress toward completion of a thesis or dissertation. NP indicates no progress or inadequate progress.
W		(carries no credit hours or quality points) indicates that the student officially withdrew from the course.

Incompletes

Based on adopted University of Tennessee-Knoxville and SIS policy, a grade of *I* (Incomplete) is reserved for emergencies that prevent the student from completing the course on time. Incompletes are granted only under "the most unusual of circumstances" and solely at the discretion of the instructor. Plan your semester's course of study carefully to ensure sufficient time to complete the required work.

For students who simply "disappear" without contacting the instructor and without completing the required form, an "F" is submitted.

COMPUTING REQUIREMENTS AND RESOURCES

Requirements

You must have adequate computing skills, including but not limited to use of word processing, Web browsers, e-mail, listservs, Canvas, and Zoom software. You must learn how to submit your assignments using Canvas. In addition, you must have software installed on your computer to download and open the (pptx format) lecture notes from Canvas. The [Office of Information Technology \(OIT\)](#) provides training classes in using varied technologies for students at no charge (advance registration is required). You must obtain a UT email account and subscribe to the SIS student listserv to insure you're made aware of course-related information.

Technical Support

Please review the SIS Technology Introduction website for help getting started with the tools you'll need in the program: <https://sis.utk.edu/techintro/>

For assistance with technical and computing issues, contact the OIT HelpDesk by phone at (865) 974-9900, using the [Contact Form](#), or at the [Walk-in HelpDesk](#).

Course Resources

- Canvas resources: [Online@UT Canvas](#), [Canvas Resources for Students](#)
- Zoom resources: [Getting Started with Zoom](#)
- Technology training: [LinkedIn Learning](#) (formerly Lynda.com)
- Library resources:
 - [UT Library](#)
 - UT Library's [Information for Distance Education](#)
 - UT [Research Guides](#)
 - UT [Subject Librarians](#)

ADDITIONAL POLICIES AND POINTS OF INFORMATION

Inclement Weather

"The chancellor (or appointed representative) may officially close or suspend selected activities of the university because of extreme weather conditions. When a decision to close is made, information is distributed to the campus community, shared with local media, and posted on the front page at <http://utk.edu>. SIS will cancel classes when UT is closed. Please check the SIS student listserv (UTKSIS-L@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU) for messages about closing.

Disabilities that may affect Learning

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact [Student Disability Services](#) in 2227 Dunford Hall at 865-974-6087, or by video relay at 865-622-6566 to coordinate reasonable academic accommodations.

Civility

Civility is genuine respect and regard for others: politeness, consideration, tact, good manners, graciousness, cordiality, affability, amiability and courteousness. Civility enhances academic freedom and integrity, and is a prerequisite to the free exchange of ideas and knowledge in the learning community. Our community consists of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and campus visitors. Community members affect each other's well-being and have a shared interest in creating and sustaining an environment where all community members and their points of view are valued and respected. Affirming the value of each member of the university community, the campus asks that all its members adhere to the principles of civility and community adopted by the campus: <http://civility.utk.edu/>.

CCI Diversity Statement

The College of Communication and Information recognizes that a college diverse in its people, curricula, scholarship, research, and creative activities expands opportunities for intellectual inquiry and engagement, helps students develop critical thinking skills, and prepares students for social and civic responsibilities. All members of the College benefit from diversity and the quality of learning, research, scholarship and creative activities is enhanced by a climate of inclusion, understanding and appreciation of differences and the full range of human experience. As a result, the College is committed to diversity and equal opportunity and it recognizes that it must represent the diversity inherent in American society. The College is acutely aware that diversity and fairness are foundations that unite the College's faculty, staff, students, and the larger communication and information community.

Instructor Status as a Title IX Mandatory Reporter

University of Tennessee faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. Please be aware that if you choose to confide in a faculty member regarding an issue of sexual misconduct, dating violence, or stalking, we are obligated to inform the University's Title IX Coordinator, who can assist you in connecting with all possible resources both on- and off-campus. If you would like to speak with someone confidentially, the Student Counseling Center (865-974-2196) and the Student Health Center (865-974-3135) are both confidential resources.

For additional resources and information, visit titleix.utk.edu.

Academic Integrity

Students should be familiar and maintain their *Academic Integrity* described in <https://hilltopics.utk.edu/academics/>, p. 15 as: “*Study, preparation and presentation should involve at all times the student’s own work, unless it has been clearly specified that work is to be a team effort. Academic honesty requires that the student present his or her own work in all academic projects, including tests, papers, homework, and class presentation. When incorporating the work of other scholars and writers into a project, the student must accurately cite the source of that work.*”

Students should abide by the **Honor Statement**

(<https://hilltopics.utk.edu/student-code-of-conduct/> Section X. Honor Statement)

“As a student of the University, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity.”

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in any of its several forms is intolerable, and attention to matters of documentation in all written work is expected and required. Inadvertence, alleged lack of understanding, or avowed ignorance of the various types of plagiarism are not acceptable excuses.

Specific examples of plagiarism are:

1. Copying without proper documentation (quotation marks and a citation) written or spoken words, phrases, or sentences from any source;
2. Summarizing without proper documentation (usually a citation) ideas from another source (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge);
3. Borrowing facts, statistics, graphs, pictorial representations, or phrases without acknowledging the source (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge);
4. Collaborating on a graded assignment without the instructor’s approval;
5. Submitting work, either in whole or in part, created by a professional service and used without attribution (e.g., paper, speech, bibliography, or photograph).

Students who may be unsure of the nature of plagiarism should consult the instructor or a guide for writing research reports. (Additional resources are available at <https://libguides.utk.edu/scholarlypublishing/plagiarism.>)

Infractions of academic integrity are penalized according to the severity of the infraction but may include a course grade of "F."

DISCLAIMER

This syllabus is a work in progress. Thank you for your patience as I inevitably refine and update this document over the course of the semester.

SYLLABUS UPDATE HISTORY

Version 1.0 – July 28, 2022

- Thank you to Dr. Awa Zhu for the initial course design in 2020.
- Thank you Phil Edwards for language about participation and attendance