INFM 600 Information Environments
Fall 2014 (Online)

Instructor: Dr. Jessica Vitak
E-mail: jvitak@umd.edu
Office: Hornbake 2117G
Class location: Canvas site: https://myelms.umd.edu/courses/1092929
Class dates: September 2—December 10
Office hours: Virtual (Google Hangout & Canvas Chat): Wednesdays, 12pm-2pm
Physical (my office): By appointment

1. Course Description
INFM 600 Information Environments will explore various models and methodologies used to capture and deploy internal and external information and knowledge in a number of settings. Students will analyze organizations in terms of information creation, flow, sharing, conservation, and application to problem solving. The course will take into account both internal and external influences on the management of information and knowledge. We will also examine how information flows, and is managed, in online settings, and examine a number of examples of successful and unsuccessful online information management.

Course assignments will give students the opportunity to review the interaction between information flows, organizational structures, and social relations, as well encourage discussion regarding how to improve existing information policies and operating procedures.

2. Course/Learning Objectives
By the conclusion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe major concepts and theories of information;
2. Define the general and specific features of information environments;
3. Characterize data, information, and knowledge, and understand how they are created and used in organizations;
4. Discuss the role that information plays in privacy, security, ethics, and policy decisions;
5. Critically evaluate the complex relationship between technology and information; and
6. Identify and assess information problems that arise in organizations and other
environments and provide recommendations and/or solutions.

3. Course Format
This is an online-only course. No onsite meetings are required. This course applies reading and discussion-based learning approaches, as well as investigative learning approaches, to deepening your understanding of how information is conceptualized and applied across a variety of settings. The readings, activities, and discussions presented in the course materials provide opportunities to interact with your professor and fellow classmates about the course concepts. For each major theme (i.e., module), you will be asked to reflect on the course materials for that week in online discussion boards. You are encouraged to draw on personal experiences and external literature and resources to support your commentary.

FYI: There is a Canvas application for Android, iPhones, and iPads.
- See https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/canvas-by-instructure-cloud/id480883488?mt=8. This is not required and the application does not support all features.
- The Canvas URL (required at log-in) is umd.instructure.com
- Canvas provides overviews on how to use the Canvas app for iPhones and iPads.

All students should make sure their virus protection on their computers are up-to-date and install an anti-virus program if they do not have one installed already. There will be a lot of file sharing in this course and we want to ensure that no one’s computer gets infected.

4. Course Materials
There is no required textbook for this course.

On Canvas (https://elms.umd.edu/), you will find the course syllabus and schedule, presentation materials, announcements, assignment details, and additional readings about the topics covered in the class.

It is essential that you regularly check your email and Canvas for updates, new content, and deadlines. Late assignments will not be accepted due to technical issues, such as Internet connectivity problems or not seeing an email, so I highly encourage you not to wait until the deadline to submit an assignment.

Students must have regular access to the Internet, as well as the ability to create and upload Word documents and video files (see Assignment 1). The introductory video assignment can be recorded on a cell phone or computer and does not have to be high quality.

5. Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites for this course.

6. Instructional Methods
This is an online course, which means the content will be delivered electronically through the university’s ELMS system (i.e., Canvas). The course is divided into modules that group content
by themes. Students will progress through the course in order from Module 1 to Module 8; new modules will open and close on set dates detailed below and on Canvas. Students will not be granted access to new modules before the specified dates.

The course will be taught through a variety of methods, including recorded lectures, online videos related to the course content, slide decks, discussion forums, and a Wiki page. Students have been pre-assigned into five groups of four people—these groups will serve as the teams for the final project and as groups for discussion forum interactions and peer feedback.

There is a Google+ page and a YouTube account linked to this class. Most videos will be hosted on this private YouTube channel. The Google+ page will facilitate virtual interactions between the professor and the students. (Note: You must have an G+ account to view the page. If you have a Gmail address, you have Google+ access. If you don’t have a Gmail account, create one here: http://goo.gl/g4vcQP).

The Google+ page for this course is: http://goo.gl/Q4xWZr
The YouTube page for this course is: http://www.youtube.com/user/INFM600

Both sites are private, so you need to follow/subscribe to the pages to view content. There is a page on Canvas with more details and a short video tutorial to do this.

Each student is responsible for completing the assigned readings, viewing the lecture video(s) and other supplementary materials (if applicable), and participating in the online discussions.

7. Course Assessment
Detailed instructions regarding each assignment will be provided. Assessment of all assignments is directly related to attention to the instructions, clarity of expression and presentation, and evidence of critical thinking. Please note: Students will be assigned to teams of 4-5 people at the beginning of class, with a unique space provided for each team, and many assignments involve interactions with team members.

Grading rubrics for Assignments 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5 will be posted on Canvas. I strongly encourage students to review them before completing each assignment, as these rubrics detail how I grade each assignment. Assignments 7.1 and 7.2 will be graded on general quality and completeness of the task(s).

7.1 Introduction (5%)—DUE SEPTEMBER 10: As this is an online-only course, we do not experience the benefits associated with in-person interaction. As part of the first module, each student should create a short (1 minute max) video introducing themselves and upload it to the Canvas Discussion board labeled "Introduction Videos."
In the video, students should provide:
• their name
• where they’re from originally
• if this is their first online course
• what they're looking forward to the most in this class
• what they hope to do after receiving their degree/their career goals; and
• a fun fact about themselves.

Next, to encourage students to get to know their classmates, students will watch and post a comment **for at least two** other students’ videos.

**7.2 Discussion Board Participation (30%)—DUE AT THE CLOSE OF EACH MODULE:** Because this is an online-only class, the discussion boards are meant to supplement in-class discussions and activities that would normally occur face-to-face. Students have been pre-assigned to teams of 4-5 people to avoid the information overload that would likely occur if 20 people tried to all talk at the same time about a topic.

For Modules 1-7, discussion forums will open on the start date of each module with guiding question(s) related to that module’s content. During the module’s “open” period, students are expected to contribute a minimum of three (3) posts to the discussion, addressing the original question, other students’ contributions, and any additional comments from the professor. Each post should be a minimum of 150 words. Students are encouraged to share links to related content and experiences from their own lives that relate to the topic.

Grading: Each module’s discussion forum is worth 5% of the student’s final grade, with the lowest score being dropped at the end of the semester.

**Important Note:** Discussion forums are meant to challenge us to think about issues and, sometimes, rethink our positions. If you disagree with another student, you should express where you differ in opinion, but most importantly, **be respectful.** Think of your classmates as your work colleagues: we often don’t get to choose who we work with and we may disagree on many things, but it is important to retain a positive environment where people are not afraid to share their opinions.

**7.3 Organizational Use of Social Media (15%)—DUE OCTOBER 22:** Organizations of all sizes increasingly rely on social media to reach new and existing customers, advertise products, provide customer service, and a range of other informational opportunities. Choose an organization that has a social media presence and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of it in a **800-1200 word** (excluding references) paper. What kinds of information is disseminated through social media? How is using social media to engage in these information practices different than more traditional methods? Finally, discuss whether you believe the organization is optimizing the technology to share information with different audiences. Students should include at least **three references** to articles directly referencing that organization’s social media use or that of related companies. This assignment is due by the closing of Module 4 on October 22.

**7.4 Information Problem Analysis (15%)—DUE NOVEMBER 19:** Three recent “information
problems” (faced by organizations or individuals) will be posted to Canvas by October 15. Incorporating knowledge gained from class, evaluate the information problem in a 1000-1500 word (excluding references) critical paper that addresses all questions included in the chosen scenario. Analyses should include a minimum of five references, which can include but are not limited to readings from class. You will be graded on your ability to evaluate the problem and provide a well-researched response, not your ability to offer your own opinion (unless it is directly asked for in the question). Please see above regarding proper citation techniques. Wikipedia is not a valid reference. This assignment is due by the closing of Module 6 on November 19.

7.5 Final Project (35%): The team project is an opportunity to get experience with information seeking, analysis, and synthesis, skills that will be important in a management position. Organizations often ask project teams to conduct research and produce short white papers presenting the results of their work; for this project, teams will conduct research on an information-related topic and present the results in a short problem/solution-style white paper of approximately 4000 words.

Below I have provided details for each deliverable for this project. Teams are encouraged to email me early and often with questions about their projects.

7.5.1 Proposal (5/35 points)—TWO DUE DATES (September 30 & October 4): Each team, comprised of 4-5 students and pre-assigned at the start of class, should use whatever communication tools they prefer (Canvas, Skype/Hangouts, email, face-to-face meetings, etc.) to come up with a topic for the final project. Topics should reflect the broad goals of this course and focus on information creation, sharing, seeking, management, and/or analysis. Make sure the information problem chosen is one that can be analyzed within the time constraints of the semester!

In the past, many teams have chosen to analyze various informational components of a local organization; this is still acceptable, but students may also choose to analyze a non-organizational topic as well. Students unsure of a topic may want to review business and tech news sites, such as Wired, TechCrunch, Businessweek, or ComputerWorld to get an idea of some of the “hot topics” in information today (I’ve included links to these sites and others on the “Useful Links” page of the Wiki on Canvas). Teams that are unsure if their topic is acceptable should contact the professor prior to the due date to discuss.

Sample topics covered in previous semesters include:

- Do biometrics provide a sufficient level of security?
- The power and impact of big data analytics
- Taking credit card Security seriously
- Benefits and drawbacks of organizations’ work-from-home policies
- Campus/local organization evaluations of:
  - Information flow
  - Use of technology
Communication breakdowns

Teams should prepare a 300-600 word proposal for their topic that details the question(s) they are interested in analyzing, the motivation guiding this topic, and how they plan to evaluate the topic. Each team must collect at least two types of data. Review the Wiki page on Data Collection for resources on various methods. In the past, teams have conducted surveys (of students, administrators, or consumers), interviewed key personnel from an organization, experienced an organization as a participant observer, and conducted an analysis of related literature. The proposal is due by 11:59 p.m. on September 30.

On October 1, the proposals will be posted to Canvas. Each student will be assigned to another proposal and should review it and provide feedback. This is a good opportunity for students to not only see others’ ideas (that might be helpful in their own projects) but also to provide helpful advice that might improve the team’s project. The feedback (minimum 150 words) is due October 4, 11:59 p.m.

Each student will then be asked to review the proposal from another team and provide that team with feedback on their proposal (a listing of this assignment will be posted to Canvas and emailed to the students). Proposals will be made available to everyone. Students should read through the proposal and in a minimum of 150 words, comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, and suggestions they have for the team, and any questions they have for the team. Students must submit their feedback, via the discussion board threads created for this purpose, by the closing of Module 3 (October 4).

7.5.2: Progress Report (5/35 points)—DUE November 1: By the closing of Module 5, each team should submit a progress report (minimum 400 words) summarizing the work completed to date, how they plan to complete the task, and any problems or questions they have. If teams have drafted any content, they may include that for review. The more content a team provides, the more feedback I can offer.

Just as project teams have supervisors review their progress, this is an opportunity for the professor to review each team’s progress and offer feedback to improve the project prior to its submission. Therefore, the professor will also schedule a virtual meeting with the team for following week.

7.5.3 White Paper (15/35 points)—DUE DECEMBER 14: Each team’s white paper will evolve from the individual project and research questions that team is assigned. This project should follow a similar format to a problem/solution white paper, in which you identify the issue of interest, provide background on why it is a “problem,” offer a “solution,” and provide supporting evidence for your stance.

A general outline for the white paper follows. Your paper is not required to follow this exact format, but it is recommended you include the starred sections at minimum. You can include additional sections as you desire. Overviews and descriptions of white papers vary, but some
examples can be found here (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/546/) and here (http://www.dirjournal.com/business-journal/how-to-write-a-white-paper/).

• Title* (including authors)
• Executive Summary: short (150-200 words) description of the paper that describes the problem and solution
• Introduction*: Introduces the topic, provides overview of the white paper, i.e., what the rest of the paper will do.
• Background*: Where you describe the problem in detail based on what other research has found.
• Solution/Recommendations*: Where you argue for the best solution(s) (and potentially discuss alternative solutions and describe why they are inferior).
• Conclusion: Summarizes the paper; used as a way to enhance readers’ understanding of topic.
• Visuals: Charts, graphs, or images can be included to highlight or enhance your argument. Note: if you are using an image from another source, you MUST include cite the source.
• References*: Make sure these are formatted consistently (and referenced in the text).

7.5.4: Web Resource (10/35 points)—DUE DECEMBER 14: In your future work, it is not only essential to be able to research and write effectively, but also to be able to convey information through a variety of sources. Therefore, each team will be responsible for creating an interactive web resource to share content related to their research topic. Be creative! The page can include hyperlinks to related material, images, charts, infographics, content from the white paper, and any other features that will enhance the presentation. Teams can use the Pages function built into Canvas, space from their own websites, or use a blogging service like WordPress. Pages on Canvas have already been set aside for each team. Students are highly encouraged to view each others’ pages following the deadline.

8. Course Policies

8.1 Written Work: All written work should be proofread and revised as necessary before you submit it. Use a standard, 12-point font (e.g., Times, Calibri) with one-inch margins and single-spacing in all submitted assignments. For longer assignments, it is helpful to organize your papers, using section and subsection headings to identify portions of your work—much like the way the syllabus is laid out. For all assignments, do not include a title page or table of contents. Documents submitted online should be submitted as Word documents (.doc or .docx).

For assignments including citations, I do not require you a specific citation format, but YOU MUST USE a standard citation format, which includes an in-text citation (e.g., [3] or Smith, 1998) as well as a list of references at the end of each paper. Acceptable citation formats include, but are not limited to, APA, MLA, Chicago, and ACM. For more information on how to
For online discussion forum posts, please make sure you proofread and spellcheck posts before uploading them. I suggest writing posts in Word first, then copying and pasting the final (proofread) version into the discussion forum.

8.2 Late Work: Unless you are facing an emergency situation AND you request an extension from me at least 48 hours in advance of the due date, late work will automatically be graded down by one step (i.e., 5%) for each day it is late (unless otherwise noted in the syllabus). For example, an assignment that would normally receive an A- if submitted on time would receive a B if it was submitted two days late. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted.

8.3 Grading Information and Criteria: Please keep in mind that assignments are the main way I can tell whether you comprehend the material covered. Use these as platforms to show me what you have learned. Please be sure to use references and appropriate in-text citations in all assignments submitted for grading. This shows me how you used the material covered and any outside readings to support your position.

In general, grading will assess graduate writing skills, understanding of course concepts, the linking of course material to practical situations, the extent to which the assigned question(s) have been address, and incorporation of scholarly support using appropriately cited references.

The grading scale (including corresponding GPA) for the final grade is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>95-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>90-94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>80-84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>75-79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>65-69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>70-74.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>60-64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Less than 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4 Review of Graded Material: I try very hard to evaluate each assignment fairly, but I can only evaluate what you submit. I don’t have the benefit of knowing all of the time and effort you have put into an assignment. Therefore, you need to make that effort stand out.

Because there may be times when I misinterpret what you have written, which is why I am always willing to clarify how I graded your assignment. If you have any questions about a grade you received, you have two weeks from receipt of the grade to contact me (in class, through a meeting, or via email) to discuss your grade. After two weeks have passed, that grade is “locked” and I will not re-evaluate it.

8.5 Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact me and Disability Support Services (http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/; 301-314-7682), as early as possible in the term, but not
later than the second week of class. Disability Support Services will verify your disability and

8.6 Instructor Email Policies: Please include “INFM600” in the subject line of all emails to me. This will help ensure I do not overlook your email. If you send me an email, I will reply within 48 hours. If that much time has elapsed and you have not heard from me, please contact me again. Alternatively, you can send me messages through Canvas.

8.7 Syllabus Change Policy: This syllabus is subject to change with advance notice. If a change becomes necessary, I will announce the change in class and/or send an email.

9. Academic Assistance
If you are experiencing difficulties in keeping up with the academic demands of this course, please consider contacting the Learning Assistance Service, 2202 Shoemaker Building, 301-314-7693. Their educational counselors can help with time management, reading, math learning skills, note-taking and exam preparation skills. All their services are free to UMD students.

10. Academic Integrity
The University of Maryland has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student, you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.shc.umd.edu.

As defined by the University of Maryland, Academic Dishonesty includes the following activities:
   a) “CHEATING: intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.
   b) FABRICATION: intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
   c) FACILITATING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate any provision of this Code.
   d) PLAGIARISM: intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise.”

Academic dishonesty also includes buying assignments, submitting the same paper more than once, forging signatures, submitting fraudulent documents, etc. Infractions may result in a penalty, such as a failing grade on a specific assignment or for the entire course or even expulsion from the University. You may also find this Office of Student Conduct definition of academic dishonesty to be helpful: http://osc.umd.edu/OSC/AcademicDishonesty.aspx.

Plagiarism in any course assignment will not be tolerated. Students who submit an assignment
containing plagiarized text (including lack of proper attribution, including quoted material with encasing copied text in quotes, copying part of an assignment from another student, or insufficiently paraphrasing content from another source) will have their assignment returned, ungraded, and they will have three (3) days to re-submit the assignment with the plagiarism issues addressed. Students will also receive a penalty of up to 50% of the assignment grade. If a second case of plagiarism is detected, students will automatically receive an F in the class and will be referred to the university for disciplinary action.

Students are encouraged to check their assignments prior to submission using one of the free online plagiarism checkers (e.g., www.grammarly.com).

11. Class Schedule
Below is an overview of the course, which is divided into eight modules, including an overview of each topic we’ll be discussing, the date range for that module, assignment(s) due with that module, and a tentative list of readings. New modules open two days before the close of the prior module and may be started once students have completed all tasks in the prior module.

Specific tasks for each module are detailed on Canvas (click on “Modules” in the left-hand toolbar or click on your chosen module from the Home Page). For example, the list of readings may change, and students should refer to Canvas to confirm the final reading list.

Module 1: Introduction to the Course/What Is Information?
In this module, students will be introduced to INFM600 and guided through the course features. Students will also watch videos related to understanding the complex nature of information in today’s business and consumer worlds.
• **Open/Close Dates:** September 2/September 10
• **Assignments:** 7.1 (Introduction) and 7.2 (Discussion Board)
• **Readings:** Braman (1989); Buckland (1991); Davenport (1997)

Module 2: Overview of Information Management Paradigms
For our second module, we look at some of the key concepts related to information and knowledge management. Because you will take specific courses related to information & knowledge management as part of this program, the goal of this module is to introduce you to the topic.
• **Open/Close Dates:** September 8/September 18
• **Assignments:** 7.2 (Discussion Board)
• **Readings:** Abele (2011); Mclnerney (2002); Nardi & O’Day (1999); Olson & Olson (2000)

Module 3: Producing, Seeking, Consuming & Interpreting Information
Individuals and organizations are both creators and consumers of information. In this module, we explore the various ways information moves from creator to consumer, as well as address
the challenges individuals face when interpreting information.

- **Open/Close Dates**: September 16/October 4
- **Assignment**: 7.2 (Discussion Board) & 7.5 (Final Project: Proposal + Peer Review of Proposals)

### Module 4: Technology in the Workplace

Technological innovations over the last two centuries have drastically changed how business is conducted locally and around the globe. But can technology solve all institutional problems? This module looks at the role information and communication technologies have played in the workplace, and whether technologies are more helpful or harmful.

- **Open/Close Dates**: October 2/October 22
- **Assignments**: 7.2 (Discussion Board) and 7.3 (Organizational Use of Social Media)
- **Readings**: Brynjolfsson & Hitt (2000); DiMicco et al. (2008); Leonardi et al. (2013); Skeels & Grudin (2009); Thayler & Tucker (2013)

### Module 5: Creating a Culture of Information Openness

Every organization has a culture surrounding its use of and attitudes toward information. Google has historically been well known for its 80/20 culture, which focused on innovation and creativity. In this module, we look at a number of case studies of organizations’ information cultures to see what works, what doesn’t, and how organizations can choose the best model for their needs.

- **Open/Close Dates**: October 20/November 1
- **Assignments**: 7.2 (Discussion Board) and 7.5 (Final Project: Progress Report)
- **Readings**: Amabile et al. (2014); Catmull (2008); Charan (2006); Goffee & Jones (2013)

### Module 6: Information Privacy, Security, & Ethics

Barely a day goes by without new questions being raised about the privacy and security of personal information being collected and stored by organizations. A number of recent high-stakes security breaches have revealed just how far behind security measures are in many organizations. Furthermore, ethical questions continue to pervade, especially regarding what organizations can do with user data. We will tackle a range of problems in this module.

- **Open/Close Dates**: October 30/November 19
- **Assignments**: 7.2 (Discussion Board) and 7.4 (Information Problem Analysis)
- **Readings**: Culnan & Williams (2009); Herath & Rao (2009); Smith et al. (2011); Zimmer (2010)

### Module 7: The Future of Information

How will information’s role in organizations evolve in future years? What types of jobs will diminish and what will take their place? How will the collection and analysis of big data respond to concerns and critiques as individual personalization techniques improve? This module looks at some of the major topics related to changing perspectives on information access, management and analysis.
Module 8: Conclusion & Reflections
In concluding the class we return to the beginning and once more try to define information. This short module focuses on the high-level takeaways students can use both in other classes and in their careers.

- **Open/Close Dates**: December 1/December 14
- **Assignment**: 7.5 (Final Project: White Paper/Web Resource/Peer Review)

12. References


