SLIS 5200 FAQ
(Frequently Asked Questions)

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Class Procedures

5200 Central

Q. What is 5200 Central?
A. 5200 Central is the mail address for a group of Teaching Assistants who handle the daily processes for SLIS 5200. These processes include:
   - Collecting all drafts and assignment submissions
   - Routing drafts to student peers for reviews
   - Notifying students about late assignments
   - Distributing class materials
   - Answering technical questions about Blackboard and Inmagic
   - Other tasks as assigned.

Q. When should I email 5200 Central?
A. Any time you have a question about class procedures, due dates, Inmagic, class-related Blackboard questions, or if you are having problems with class documents. Also, all assignments must be submitted as attachments to the 5200 Central mail address.

Q. Can I reach the instructor through 5200 Central?
A. No. The instructors do not check 5200 Central mail. 5200 Central staff may refer your questions to instructors, but you should mail the instructors if you need to address them directly. Do not count on 5200 Central to relay your questions to the instructor.

Q. I did not receive confirmation that 5200 Central received my assignment!
A. You won't. Due to the fact that 5200 Central may process 2000 (!) submissions in all course sites in each semester, the staff cannot acknowledge each. Assume that it has arrived safely. 5200 Central will notify you if it has not. Check your email within 24 hours for a message notifying you about any problems.

Online modules

Q. What is the purpose of the online modules in Blackboard? Why do some modules contain the same material as the class lectures?
A. While the majority of the general course content is covered in the class lectures, it is not realistic to expect you to learn and remember all of the material at that time. The Blackboard online modules represent detailed and supplementary material spread out in a more traditional, sequential manner throughout the semester. The modules are organized to address issues you will face as you move through the Information Organization Project (IOP). Also, the readings are keyed to specific modules and specific concepts, and serve as further learning material.

Q. When will the modules be opened?
A. Usually the Blackboard modules are opened several days before the day that module is assigned on the class schedule. They will remain open for the duration of the semester.

Readings

Q. Are the readings mandatory?
A. Given the complex nature of the material in this class, you are encouraged to read as many of them as possible. The readings are intended to help you deal with decision points in your project, to aid your conceptual
understanding, and to give a flavor of real-world applications of the concepts. There are no tests on the readings or reading responses, but your understanding of the readings will likely be reflected in better work on the IOP.

**Q. Why are some of the readings online, while others are provided only in hard copy?**

A. Because UNT has not been able to obtain electronic rights to every article. In some cases the publishers are reluctant, electronic access is cost-prohibitive, or the article is simply not available electronically.

**Q. Will we be tested on the content of the readings?**

A. No. But the readings often come up in online discussions and in class chats. The course requires you to demonstrate an understanding of many of the concepts in your IOP.

**Tests and quizzes**

**Q. Are there midterm and final examinations in this class?**

A. No. The final act for this class is to turn in a completed Draft 4 of the IOP.

**Q. Are quizzes given in class or online?**

A. No. However, we do have some nongraded exercises in class and in Blackboard to help you better understand various information organization concepts and applications.

**Grades**

**Q. How is our final grade determined?**

A. The majority of your grade is based on progressive completion of the IOP. In other words, it is very important that you meet deadlines, participate in peer review, and make improvements in your draft as you go along. For example, when you are expected to consider and respond to the instructor’s suggestions on a draft.

Further, successful completion of the IOP itself is not sufficient for a passing grade. You must also provide a concept briefing, participate in peer review, and show evidence of online participation. Each of these affects your final grade. See the Syllabus for actual percent distribution of each assignment.

**Q. What happens if we do not turn in one of the drafts?**

A. If it is a preliminary draft, you will not be allowed to participate in peer review for that draft, and you will lose points. If it is a final graded draft and you do not have instructor’s permission to be late, you will be penalized for each day that it is late. If you do not turn it in at all, you will receive a “0” for that portion of the assignment. You may receive an F as a final semester grade.

**Q. What level of effort should I expect to put into this class?**

A. You should plan to spend 3-4 hours per week per credit hour (i.e., 12-16 hours a week) during the fall or spring semester on readings, assignments, chats, email, etc. In the summer term, expect to spend more time per week over fewer weeks. At times your commitment will be more intense, particularly from a few days before a preliminary draft deadline until submission of a final draft.

**Q. What if I have an emergency and cannot make one of the deadlines?**

A. If it looks as if you will be unable to meet a deadline, contact the instructor. Emergencies are understood, but particularly in the summer, they can seriously affect your ability to complete this class. Naturally some are more critical than others. Sudden severe illness, accidents, deaths in the immediate family, etc, may be excused by the instructors. However, vacations, houseguests, shopping etc, should be planned around the class, rather than having the class planned around them.
Information Organization Project (IOP)

Formatting

Q. Do the headings have to be boldfaced?
A. Yes. Boldfacing makes it easier for the instructor to move back to a specific part while correcting.

Q. Can I use bulleted lists?
A. Yes, in moderation. However, a bulleted list should not take the place of an entire section of narrative. Bulleted lists must be introduced with narrative text—they don’t stand by themselves.

Q. Can I make up my own headings?
A. No. Part of the assignment is to work within the parameters we give you.

Q. Can I quote or cite?
A. No. We want all of your wording to be original. Especially do not quote the instructor.

Q. Can I use tables in the narrative?
A. Yes, in moderation.

1. Project description

Q. Can I choose a collection of nontext information objects?
A. Yes, but we encourage you to think hard about whether you want to do so. Particularly, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will there be personal or corporate names that I can put under authority?
- Do the objects have "subjects" or "intellectual content"?
- Will I have a field that has enough variations in terms that could be used to create a controlled vocabulary (thesaurus)?
- Is there enough difference in each object to easily describe it uniquely?

Q. What if my objects do not actually exist, or if the collection is not together in one place?
A. That is a judgment call by the instructor. While feasible, such collections often present difficulties that take a very high degree of thought to adequately describe in a database.

Q. Who are my users?
A. You tell us! If you pick a collection, you also have to describe who will use the collection.

Q. What if I am the only user?
A. In most cases, we will ask you to pick a different collection. Whole sections of the IOP rely on adequate description of a group of users. Generally you should have a collection that will be used by several hundred users.

Q. If I choose books for my collection, can they all be by one author?
A. This is a judgment call by the instructor. You must be able to demonstrate that each book can be adequately described in a unique manner. A good rule of thumb is the more alike the objects, the less likely they will make a good project.
Q. How many user groups should I have?
A. Preferably only one. Some collections may have many users, but we ask you to concentrate on one or a maximum of two user groups. Remember, you are designing a system for users, and multiple user groups bring additional challenges in system design.

Q. What questions will my users ask?
A. You tell us! Remember, if you assume that users will use the collection, you must have some idea of how they will start to access and interact with it. If you have a bunch of science fiction books in your house, how do most people ask for books?

Q. How do I describe knowledge in my narrative?
A. You must describe the four types of knowledge by defining each, then making a judgment as to how your user group fits in each of the four types. For example, you might say, “Domain knowledge is . . . . My user group has (high/moderate/low/nonexistent) domain knowledge.”

2. Representation of information objects

Q. What is the difference between entity and entity level?
A. Think of an entity as a “thing” and entity level as the level of detail that you are going to describe. For example, if you have a bunch of relatives, and you say, “this is Suzie, and Chris, and Frank, and Casper, each person has become an entity, and your entity level is set at the individual (personal name) level. However, if you have the same bunch of relatives, and you say “I have cousins and aunts and uncles,” then each category is an entity, and the entity level is set at the category description. In the former case, you may have 50 entities (individuals), while in the latter case, you have three entities.

Q. If we have to have 10 records in the final draft, how many entities do we have to have?
A. 10. Once you set the entity level for your collection, you pick 10 entities to describe. Ultimately, those 10 entities become represented by 10 records in your database.

Q. My collection is songs on CDs. I cannot decide if the CD or the song should be my entity level.
A. It’s your call. If you feel that your users are more interested in particular songs, use songs as the entity level. If you feel the users are more interested in particular albums (CDs), then set the entity level at the whole CD.

Q. How many fields should I have?
A. As many as you feel you need to adequately describe each entity uniquely and describe appropriately for your users (end users and technical users). Keep in mind that it is always better to err on the side of too many and leave some fields empty than it is to err on the side of two few and have to go back and add new fields AND fill in the data for already existing records. Most students’ records have 8 to 15 fields.

Q. The IOP assignment says I should have a subject field, but I have a collection of nontext information objects. How do I make subjects for these?
A. This is a major reason that nontext information objects can be a challenge to use for this project. If you work with nontext objects, you have to find or create an element and field that approximates aboutness. For example, a collection of model airplanes does not have subjects in the same sense of books. To do a model airplane collection, you need an element that adequately describes some sort of aboutness. One possibility is historical significance, such as an aircraft that was critical to the U.S. strategic bombing effort in WWII.

Q. Who makes up the input rules for my fields?
A. You do.
3. Access and authority control

Q. What fields need to be under authority control?
A. Any field that has formal personal, corporate or geographic names, or has subject terms that are under the control of a thesaurus. Typically, data in several of the access points (or searchable fields in the database) will be under authority control.

4. Representation of information content

Q. What is an access point?
A. A field in the database that your users are likely to use when searching your database.

Q. Can I have more than one access point?
A. Yes, it is not unusual to have several access points, but not every field in the record. Think about the difference between fields users actually search (access points) and fields they want to see when the full record is retrieved (record display).

Q. Why are access points important?
A. There is a strong relationship between access points, authority control, and name authority. Because access points are the fields most often searched, they are also the fields you want to hone to the finest degree of usability and the highest level of precision. You do that by tightly controlling the terms used in those fields. For your major subject field, you control those terms (i.e., pick the best ones), then let users know about them by providing a thesaurus, which helps them move from their own inadequate terms to your great terms. If an access field contains personal or corporate names, you can further aid users by putting that field under name authority control.

Q. What fields should be under vocabulary control?
A. Any field you expect users to search with a considerable range of alternate terms is a good candidate for prescribing a finite number of acceptable search terms.

Q. What field should I use for my thesaurus?
A. A field that represents intellectual content or subjects. If you have several subject fields, choose the field with the greatest number of terms and the most semantically complex terms.

Q. How many entries should I put in the thesaurus?
A. You need enough authorized terms to describe all 10 of your sample objects (bearing in mind that one term may describe more than one object). After you add terms for semantic relationships, you may have 25 or more terms. Don’t try to include every possible term that might be used for your collection, but you need sufficient terms to adequately represent your 10 objects. Therefore, it is only a sample thesaurus. A good benchmark is a minimum of 15 subject terms.

Q. Do I have to show reciprocal relationships for all the terms in the thesaurus?
A. No, but you should show at least one example of each kind of relationship with all of its reciprocals. Don’t try to force a relationship on every term—that’s overkill and needless effort.

Q. How many facets should I have in my classification scheme?
A. As many as it takes to uniquely classify each entity. For the IOP, typically 4 are required.
Q. Should my facets be based on my fields?
A. If possible. While it is acceptable to create facets that are not based on existing fields, such facets require semantics, rules and guidelines all their own, which constitutes more work.

Q. Which is better, faceted or hierarchical?
A. That depends on the collection. Pure hierarchical schemes are very powerful, but do not lend to being changed after they are implemented. Faceted schemes are much more flexible and easier to locate. Most schemes devised for the IOP are faceted.

5. Name authority control

Q. What if my collection does not have any authors or other creators to put under name authority?
A. This is another problem with nontext collections. In this case remember that corporate as well as personal names are acceptable. To use the model airplane collection example, a type of aircraft element would work for name authority (e.g., flying fortress: USE Boeing B-17)

Generally, use a field that has corporate or geographic names, or formal terms with plenty of possible variations, such as dog breeds, etc. However, the further you get away from personal names, the less likely your collection will be approved for your project. In other words, if you have to really stretch to come up with a field for name authority, you should probably pick a different collection.

6. System evaluation and development

Q. How detailed should my evaluation plan be? Do I have to create the evaluation instrument?
A. No. You are not required to create an instrument, or even write survey questions. Your evaluation plan should be very general, along the lines of “I intend to use surveys and interviews to collect data on user satisfaction based on . . . .” Then list some user criteria from the online modules and readings.

Q. Whom should I use for the performance test?
A. Preferably, use someone who fits the demographics of your user group. If you cannot, or if your user group is hypothetical, try to use someone who approximates your user group. If you cannot come close to approximating your user group, use someone who has not shared your experiences in creating the database and who is not already skilled at searching. For example, do not use a veteran reference librarian when you have indicated your user group has low system knowledge and low information seeking skills.

Q. When I talk about changes, should I write as if the database will be released to the public?
A. Only if you want to. What is more important is that you look back at what you have done and talk about what you could have done differently (better), what did not work and why, and how you would fix it. Also go back to section 1 and think about potential major changes in the environment—users, collection, etc.

7. Project summary

Q. How candid can I be in my summary? If I have negative feelings will this hurt my grade?
A. Be as candid as you want. Your grade is based on the content of the IOP, not your opinion about it. Some students who get top grades have negative feelings and some who get low grades have positive feelings. Your instructor reads the summary and learns from it, trying to make the experience better for students in the next semester.
Concept Briefing

Q. What is the purpose of the Concept Briefing?
A. The Concept Briefing gives each student the opportunity to more closely explore a topic related to information organization.

Q. Why are the concept briefing abstracts posted?
A. The abstract of each briefing is posted specifically to give other students enrolled in the course the opportunity to benefit from the information in the briefing.

Q. How many references do I need?
A. You are expected to use 3 references beyond the assigned readings. This is a research paper, and you are expected to review literature in addition to the assigned class readings. Your grade will be affected if this requirement is not fulfilled.

Q. If I have a source in my reference list, does it have to be cited in my paper?
A. Yes! The reference list should contain only the sources cited, as opposed to sources that were merely consulted. The latter is a bibliography, not a reference list.

Q. Which style manual should I use for my references?
A. You may either use the latest edition of either APA or Turabian (not both). Please keep in mind that accuracy and style are of critical importance for this paper, so pay attention to details.

Q. How do I cite material from the Internet?
A. The jury is still out about exactly how to cite from the Internet. Nonetheless, the following website maintained by the APA is a great resource for dealing with Electronic References: <http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html>. Whatever you do, be consistent!

Q. Where can I get help on questions of citation style, reference lists, etc.?
A. See the document *Tips for Coursework* by Dr. Linda Schamber. This guide has been designed to assist students in the professionalization of their oral and written presentations. A significant portion of this guide is devoted to how to correctly cite in Turabian or APA style. (Examples are included.)

Q. May I use additional headings in my report?
A. Yes, however, headings beyond those listed in the project assignment should be given less prominence by indenting them and/or using a smaller point size than in the assigned headings.

Q. How many Concept Briefings must I do during the course of the semester?
A. One. Make sure that you know your topic and its due date as soon as the list is released.
Online Participation

Q. What sort of online participation is expected from me?
A. Generally, you are expected to participate in and ask questions in online class chats rather than logging in and lurking. You are also expected to exhibit some sort of active presence in various Blackboard discussions that take place during the course of the semester. Lack of true participation is mere “me too-ing,” where your participation consists only of replying to other people’s posts with, “I did too,” “I hear ya,” “Amen,” etc. Also bear in mind that email communication with the instructor does not count as online participation. The best rule of thumb is that the more you participate, the better.

Q. Do I have to attend all of the chats?
A. No, just one. However, we strongly encourage you to attend as many as possible because they are likely to answer questions you have. Further, you should read all the chat logs that are posted after each chat session.

Q. Where is the best place for me to ask questions?
A. It depends. If you think the answer will be beneficial to the class, ask it in one of the Blackboard discussions. If it pertains solely to your project or an evaluation of your work, or is a question about a grade, ask the instructor via Blackboard email.

[Document last updated 1/4/14--SVB]