

**The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Information & Media Studies**

**FIMS9855: Social Contexts of Health Information:
A Critical Review of Theory and Research**

PROFESSOR:

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CLASS LOCATION: TBD

Office hours: By appointment in NCB254.

Course website: SharePoint - <http://faculty.fims.uwo.ca/wathen/FIMS9855/default.aspx>

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

This course addresses the social or 'relational' side of health information behaviour. Following a brief review of the paradigms that informed early information seeking, retrieval and use research, we will take a critical look at some newer approaches to the study of information behaviour and associated theories, focusing on examples arising in health and health-related contexts, including information science, science and technology studies, and critical social theory. We will explore the implications of these perspectives for the study of HIS, with a particular emphasis on ways to theorize and measure the mediation of health information by different actors, across different contexts, and for a variety of explicit and less explicit purposes. At the end of the course, students will have working knowledge of key theories and methods relevant for the interdisciplinary study of topics in health information science, will be able to lead discussion of papers of various types (empirical, theoretical), and be able to present their work in a scholarly manner, both orally and in written format.

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are reminded that attendance at and timely arrival to all classes is required. Students needing to negotiate legitimate absences need to inform the instructor in advance in order to arrange for make-up work. **This may not be possible in the case of assignments designated for completion during class time.** In cases of emergency absences, students must contact the instructor as soon as possible afterwards.

Support Services: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement of Academic Offences and Plagiarism: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Plagiarism is a major academic offence and students are reminded of the University's plagiarism policy, which instructors are required to note on course outlines: *"Students must write their assignments and essays in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of text from another author they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of*

the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).”

Email policy: Student emails will be read and responded to within 48 hours of receipt, from Monday to Friday. Do not expect answers to emails at night or on weekends. Do not submit assignments by email, or to the course website, unless specifically indicated.

Readings & Online Discussions: The course is dedicated to discussing issues in health care, information studies and related fields from a theoretical and methodological perspective. Each week, a list of readings will be provided – some required and some background – that address the topic(s) to be covered the following week. The list will be posted to the course website with, where possible, a copy (for personal use only) of the reading, and/or a link to a website, call number or other instructions for obtaining the reading.

Students may wish to share particularly interesting or useful resources with their classmates. The [threaded discussion area on the course website](#) is ideal for this kind of exchange, and students are encouraged to make appropriate use of this feature.

Appropriate/acceptable use of the course website includes posting new discussion topic areas of relevance to the course, linking classmates to specific relevant materials or requesting that the instructor post specific relevant resources, etc. Unacceptable use includes discussions or responses not relevant to the course; disrespectful or otherwise inappropriate postings.

Basis of Evaluation

Two papers:

1. *an overview of conference presentation length of one theoretical perspective covered in this course and its application to a context of your choosing (e.g., clinical, policy, advocacy, media, public). This overview will provide the basis for a presentation on the perspective to the class. **25%** of final grade (written portion – see below re: presentation) [due on the date the perspective is taken up in class]*
2. *a research proposal based on the application of a theoretical perspective covered in this course to a health information behaviour problem of your choosing. The paper will include a brief overview of the perspective that leads to the research question or questions, a detailed description of the research design/methodology that would be used to ‘answer’ or address the question(s) posed, and a brief description of the method(s) that would be used to analyze the data. **40%** of final grade [due on the final day of class when all students will present their projects]*

Discussion leader and class participation:

1. *The success of any seminar relies on the substantive and meaningful contributions of all the participants. Your grade for class participation will be assessed on the basis of these contributions, including evidence of your general preparation for class, including familiarity with required readings, contributions to seminar discussions, and demonstration of respect for the ideas, opinions and feelings of other class members. In addition, most classes will have each student assigned to lead the discussion on one of the required readings. This will mean that the student will briefly introduce the paper (keeping in mind that all will have read it), and, to encourage discussion, highlight some of the key learnings they drew from it while using 2-3 prepared questions to focus attention on some of the important or controversial ideas addressed in the paper. **35%** of final grade*

Course outline (sample)

Class 1 – *Introduction, Overview and Course Planning Meeting*

SECTION 1: INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR BACKGROUND

Class 2 – *Library and Information Science Perspectives on Information Behaviour*

Class 3 – *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Health Information Behaviour*

SECTION 2: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HEALTH INFORMATION

Class 4 – *Science and Technology Studies (1)*

Class 5 – *Science and Technology Studies (2)*

Class 6 – *Critical Methodologies*

Class 7 – *Critical Perspectives on the Mediation & Mobilization of Health Information*

SECTION 3: HEALTH INFORMATION FLOW

Class 8 - *Health information flow – health organizations and professionals*

Class 9 - *Health information flow – from systems and professionals to the public*

Class 10: *Health information flow in everyday life*

SECTION 4: IMPACT OF HEALTH INFORMATION

Class 11 – *Health information as control: constructing and disciplining the consumer-citizen*

Class 12 - *Health information and constructing the self: reflexive modernity, risk culture & the role of media*

Class 13 – *Presentation of research projects*