

**LIBR 100**  
**Fall 2009**  
**Information Research**  
**Room: TH 402**  
**Syllabus**

**Thomas Hunter, Rm. 402, W, 12:10-1**  
**Instructor: Tony Doyle, [tdoyle@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:tdoyle@hunter.cuny.edu)**  
**Office hours: By appointment (Rm. 412 HE)**

### Course Description

Since the arrival of the internet a chief problem for students and researchers alike has become not too little information but too much. This embarrassment of riches means that it is more important now than ever to have the skills for homing in on relevant and credible sources. Information Research strives to meet this need.

We will cover the following topics: (1) Electronic research: selecting a manageable topic; choosing an appropriate database; identifying keywords; combining keywords with *and*, *or*, and *not*; the different types of databases (full text, index and abstract, and index). (2) Reading citations. (3) Magazines vs. scholarly journals. (4) Detecting bias or ideological assumptions in newspaper and magazine articles. (5) Books: how searching for books by subject in a catalog is different from searching for magazine or journal articles by subject in a database; why books remain a valuable source for research. (6) Reference sources. (7) Evaluating sources for credibility and bias: print, organizational websites, Wikipedia, and blogs. (8) Copyright and its justification.

### Course Goals.

At the end of the course you should be able to:

1. Navigate an academic library.
2. Know how to identify an appropriate and manageable research topic.
3. Find relevant print and electronic sources on your topic.
4. Evaluate sources, both print and electronic, as to authority, reliability, and bias.
5. Annotate and correctly cite sources.
6. Use the free web effectively.

### Required text:

William Badke, *Research Strategies*, Third Edition

Blackboard site: This course has a Blackboard site. You are expected to check the site in time to be prepared for your next class. The session for week 8 will meet online. That week you will be expected to submit some of your written work on our blog. This blog will be accessible only to you and me.

### Assignments:

Quizzes and participation: 10%

Homework: 40%

Final project:

    Oral Component: 10%

    Written Component: 25%

Final: 15%

Reading: You're expected to do the reading before the class in question. There will occasionally be quizzes on the reading assigned for that day. These exercises will be graded A, C, or F.

Homework. There will be five short assignments. No handwritten work accepted; no late work accepted. Citations have to be in MLA format. You will lose a full grade on any assignment in which you fail to follow MLA format.

Online meeting: The class will meet online on November 4. There will be two written assignments due that day.

### Final project

**Written component:** Choose a topic relating to the environment and focus on the controversy (scientific, social, ethical, or political) which has surrounded it. Below are some general topics from which you might choose; you'll be expected to narrow down to some aspect of the general topics listed here. Other topics are also possible, subject to my approval. (No more than two students per topic)

- \* Climate change/global warming
- \* Deforestation
- \* Endangered species
- \* Habitat loss
- \* Alternative energy sources
- \* Driving and the environment
- \* Public transportation and the environment
- \* The Bush Administration's "Healthy Forests" initiative
- \* Disposing of nuclear waste
- \* Industrial pollution
- \* The Bush Administration's "Clear Skies" initiative
- \* Pollution rights
- \* Suburban sprawl
- \* "Cash for Clunkers" and its environmental impact

You will be expected to give an informed and accessible discussion of your research on your topic and on your sources. You should evaluate your sources and explain how you located them. You will need to discuss the following sources.

- \* One scholarly book; has to be cataloged in CUNY+
- \* One peer reviewed article; has to be at least 7 pages long; has to be indexed in one of CUNY's subscription databases
- \* Two articles from two different magazines chosen from the List of Conservative and Liberal Journals (in BB, under Handouts). Other magazines are possible, subject to my approval. The following magazines are not eligible: *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Business Week*. Articles have to be at least 1500 words; no editorials. Articles must be indexed in one of CUNY's subscription databases.
- \* One newspaper article from one of the following: *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (at least 1000 words; no editorials), using Lexis-Nexis. These sources should come from your homework assignments of weeks 6, 7, 10, and 11.

**Focus.** The paper should focus on a discussion of your *research strategy*. In it you should address the following questions: What keywords and subject terms did you use? Which ones worked? Did you have to refine or revise your topic? If so, why? What databases did you use? Why? You should also discuss your sources. Did they deal with your topic? Were they biased? What were the authors' credentials? What bearing did these credentials have on the credibility or objectivity of the article or book? How was your strategy for finding a book different from your strategy for finding articles? Do not quote from your sources. Also, you don't need an introduction or a conclusion: You can start right off discussing your strategy and sources.

All the sources that you use have to be available at CUNY. If you have trouble finding a source, let me know.

**Purpose:** to choose a plausible topic, refine it, locate credible and relevant sources, and to defend the choices that you've made. Avoid editorializing.

**Audience:** A reasonably well informed person who, say, reads *The New York Times* or listens to NPR regularly but who lacks detailed knowledge of your topic.

**Prose:** Your prose should be grammatically correct and should eschew wordiness. It should above all be clear. Avoid run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

**Length:** five pages, double spaced, one inch margins, 12 pt. Times Roman font. All sources must be properly documented, and citations have to be in MLA format. You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. See the Hunter Reading Writing Center's superb handout on MLA format (<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/online/mla.pdf>).

**Due:** December 16, at the beginning of class

**Oral component:** Between November 18 and December 9 everyone will be expected to talk about their final paper topic for 4 minutes. I will ask people to sign up for a time during the first class. You will be required to discuss three of your sources, specifically,

- \* One peer-reviewed article
- \* One magazine article or one article from either *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, or *The Wall Street Journal*
- \* One scholarly book

These sources should come from your homework assignments. Everyone will be expected to put together a Powerpoint presentation of at least 6 slides covering the following: (1) the databases you used to find your magazine, journal, and newspaper articles, with an explanation about why you chose them; (2) the strategy you used in CUNY+ to find your book and an explanation of why you chose it. You can refer to an outline during your presentation, but you shouldn't read from a text. Also, you must bring your book with you for your presentation.

**Assessment of final project.** In your oral presentation I will be looking for lucid coverage of the themes mentioned above. Your essay will be graded on the overall quality of your presentation, specifically (1) the clarity of your prose, (2) the coherence of your essay, (3) the extent to which you address the questions mentioned above in **Focus**, and (4) the quality of the sources that you have chosen.

**Late work: All assignments are due at the beginning of class. I will accept nothing electronically unless noted. I will accept no late work without a legitimate, documented excuse.**

**Lateness and absences: You will not pass the course if you miss more than two classes unless you have a compelling, documented excuse. Lateness after 5 minutes will be counted as half an absence; lateness after 15 minutes will be counted as a full absence. You are responsible for everything covered in classes that you miss. If you are late or absent for your presentation, you will not be able to make it up without a compelling, documented excuse.**

**Please note: There will be no incompletes.**

**Communication:** Occasionally I will want to get in touch with the whole class by email. I will address all emails to your Hunter account. If you're not in the habit of checking your Hunter account, please have your emails forwarded from it to the account that you do check regularly. I will only respond to emails Monday through Friday, 10AM-6PM.

**Plagiarism and cheating.** Cheating on quizzes or the exam will result in an automatic F for the exercise. I will also report you to the college's student disciplinary committee for possible further sanctions. Plagiarism is any attempt to pass someone else's ideas or research off as your own, through either unattributed direct quotation or paraphrasing. It's a kind of theft. Plagiarism on the final essay will also result in an automatic F for the

assignment, and I will again report you to the student disciplinary committee. Plagiarism doesn't pay: if you try it, you will almost certainly get caught.

**Safe Assignments.** If I suspect you of plagiarism, I will submit your work to Safe Assignments, Blackboard's anti-plagiarism software.

**Class rules.** Please put your phone or hand held away and leave it off during class; no internet searching that is not directly related to class; no food or drink.

#### CUNY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/english2/plagiarism.html>

Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion.

Cheating is the unauthorized use or attempted use of material, information, notes, study aids, devices or communication during an academic exercise.

The following are some examples of cheating, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- \* Copying from another student during an examination or allowing another to copy your work.
- \* Unauthorized collaboration on a take home assignment or examination.
- \* Using notes during a closed book examination.
- \* Taking an examination for another student, or asking or allowing another student to take an examination for you.
- \* Changing a graded exam and returning it for more credit.
- \* Submitting substantial portions of the same paper to more than one course without consulting with each instructor.
- \* Preparing answers or writing notes in a blue book (exam booklet) before an examination. Allowing others to research and write assigned papers or do assigned projects, including use of commercial term paper services. Giving assistance to acts of academic misconduct or dishonesty
- \* Fabricating data (all or in part).
- \* Submitting someone else's work as your own.
- \* Unauthorized use during an examination of any electronic devices such as cell phones, palm pilots, computers or other technologies to retrieve or send information.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own.

The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- \* Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source..
- \* Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
- \* Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
- \* Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.

Internet plagiarism includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, and "cutting & pasting" from various sources without proper attribution.

Obtaining Unfair Advantage is any activity that intentionally or unintentionally gives a student an unfair advantage in his/her academic work over another student.

The following are some examples of obtaining an unfair advantage, but by no means it is an exhaustive list:

- \* Stealing, reproducing, circulating or otherwise gaining advance access to examination materials.
- \* Depriving other students of access to library materials by stealing, destroying, defacing, or concealing them.
- \* Retaining, using or circulating examination materials which clearly indicate that they should be returned at the end of the exam.
- \* Intentionally obstructing or interfering with another student's work.

Adapted with permission from Baruch College: A Faculty Guide to Student Academic Integrity.

## **Class schedule**

### **Week 1 (September 2)**

1. Information
  - a. How is information produced?
  - b. How does it find its way to you?
  - c. How do we assess its credibility?
  - d. Peer review
  - e. Primary vs. secondary sources

### **Week 2 (September 9)**

1. Choosing a viable research topic
  - a. Topic
  - b. Thesis
2. What is a database?
  - a. Indexes
  - b. Indexes with abstracts
  - c. Full text databases
3. Choosing the right databases:
  - a. General databases vs. specialized databases
  - b. Scholarly databases vs. non-scholarly databases
4. Working with Academic Search Premier
  - a. Boolean methods and proximity operators
  - b. Controlled vocabulary: subject indexing/headings

Reading: Badke, pp. 12.5-13.2; 15-20; 24-30

Homework (due week 3):

Choose a topic for your final project and specify three questions you want answered about that topic; due at the beginning of class, September 16.

### **Week 3 (September 16)**

1. Keyword searching vs. field searching vs. full text searching
2. Reading citations
3. Annotated bibliographies
4. Writing annotations
5. Creating bibliographies with Refworks

Reading: Badke, pp. 32-40; 76-91

Homework (due Week 4). Write a 150 word annotation on the article handed out in class today. Annotations are more than a summary of a source: Your annotation should discuss the main theme(s) of the piece as well as attempt to identify the author's point of view or any political biases. Is the author liberal or conservative, or does the piece have no obvious political orientation? For an example see Sample Annotation in Assignments in Blackboard. You will be graded on how effectively you meet the above requirements and on the clarity of your prose. Citations in MLA format. See the Hunter Reading Writing Center's superb handout on MLA format (<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/online/mla.pdf>). You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. For more information on how to write an annotation (from Cornell) go to <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>. This assignment is worth 3% of your total grade.

#### **Week 4 (September 23)**

1. Finding newspaper articles in Lexis-Nexis
2. Specialized databases
  - a. Scholarly: Psycinfo and its thesaurus
  - b. Mixed scholarly and popular: Gender Watch
3. General scholarly database: Jstor

#### **Week 5 (September 30)**

1. Periodicals: scholarly, trade, and popular sources
2. Peer review
3. Detecting political, religious, etc., viewpoints or bias in magazine or newspaper articles
4. Plausibility of information:
  - a. Is the information consistent with mainstream views?
  - b. Credible challenges to the mainstream

Reading: Badke, pp. 76-79; also "And the Winner Is . . ." The Economist 387.8582 (May 31, 2008): 36; Kinsley, Michael. "The Twilight of Objectivity." Washington Post, March 31, 2006: A19.

Homework (due week 6) Provide citations and 150 word annotations for two articles on the topic of your final project from two different magazines included on the List of Conservative and Liberal Journals (in Handouts, on Blackboard). Other magazines are eligible, subject to my approval. Do not use any of the following magazines: *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Business Week*. The articles must come from magazines with different ideological orientations. Articles must be at least 1500 words; no editorials. Your articles must be indexed in at least one of CUNY's subscription databases. The articles must be relevant to your topic. Your annotations should justify your choice of articles. You will be graded on how effectively you meet the above requirements and on the clarity of your prose. Citations in MLA format. You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. Please indicate your topic on your

assignment; please attach your articles to your annotations. Each annotation is worth 3% of your final grade.

**Week 6 (October 7):**

1. Books and CUNY+
2. Strategies for finding books vs. strategies for finding articles
3. Library of Congress classification
4. Deciphering catalog records
5. Controlled vocabulary again
6. Using the Library of Congress subject headings
7. Scholarly books vs. trade books
8. Publishers and record labels

Reading: Badke, 58-65; 71-74

Homework (due Week 7):

1. Provide citations and annotations of 150 words each for two newspaper articles on your final topic from two of the following three newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, or *The Wall Street Journal*. You must use Lexis-Nexis to find your articles. Your annotations should justify your choice of articles. You will be graded on how effectively you meet the above requirements and on the clarity of your prose. Citations in MLA format. You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. Please indicate your topic on your assignment; please attach your articles to your annotations. Each annotation is worth 3% of your final grade.
2. Refined topic due. Specify the aspect of your topic that you would like to research. For instance, if your topic is climate change, you might focus on international agreements concerning climate change. 1-2 sentences

**Week 7 (October 21; no class October 14): Books (cont.)**

1. Books as sources of bibliographies
2. Google Books
3. Library ebooks
4. Finding book reviews in databases
5. Strong sources for book reviews: *The New York Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement (TLS)*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New Republic*

Reading: Badke, pp. 74-76

Also:

Grafton, Anthony. "Future Reading." The New Yorker, 83.34 (November 5, 2007): 50-54.

### **Week 8 (October 28); guest lecturer, Professor Danise Hoover of the library**

#### 7. Reference sources

- a. Online general sources
  - i. Gale Virtual Reference Library
  - ii. Oxford Reference Online
- b. Print reference sources

Reading: Badke, pp. 20-23

Online class: work due for week 9 (November 4):

Part 1. Comparing Wikipedia and Gale Virtual Reference Library  
(<http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/databases>)

Step 1: Go to Wikipedia and look up your research topic. Wander around, hyperlink until you find a subject/topic that is related to your topic. In roughly 150 words describe the process of finding information. Consider these questions: How many times did you hyperlink? How many choices did you encounter? Did you find information on your topic? What was the title of the article which had the most information?

Step 2: Go to Gale Virtual Reference Library (<http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/databases>), and look up your topic there. In roughly 150 words describe the process of finding information again. Consider again: How many times did you hyperlink? How many choices did you encounter? Did you find information on your topic? What was the title of the article which had the most information?

Step 3: In 150 words describe the strengths and weaknesses of using Wikipedia and Gale Virtual Reference Library for your research topic.

**Due in your Blog by November 4, 11:55 AM. Work submitted after the deadline will not be credited or commented on.** This assignment is worth 9% of your final grade.

Part 2: Do the assigned reading and look at the Powerpoint in BB, "Evaluating the Web." Provide short answers to the following questions.

1. Why does Garfinkel think that Wikipedia "has redefined the accepted meaning of truth?"

2. The article “Battle of Britannica” gives two reasons for why the *Nature* magazine comparison between Britannica and Wikipedia might have been misleading. What are these reasons?
3. What are Wikipedia’s core content policies?
4. What does Wikipedia consider to be “the most reliable sources?”
5. Why is evaluating information found on the internet even more important than evaluating information found in a book published by a respected publisher or in a reputable magazine or newspaper?
6. Why is it important to understand the motives behind the creation and maintenance of websites?

**Email the answers to me ([tdoyle@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:tdoyle@hunter.cuny.edu)) by November 4, 11:55 AM. Work submitted after the deadline will not be credited or commented on.** This assignment is worth 4% of your total grade.

### **Week 9 (November 4) Online**

1. Wikipedia
2. Wikipedia vs. Gale Virtual Reference Library
3. Evaluating the free web
  - a. The different purposes of information sources
  - b. The role of authority in determining the accuracy of an information source
  - c. The role of corroboration in determining the accuracy of an information source
  - d. Why trust a reputable print source?
  - e. Special evaluative challenges presented by most websites

Reading: Badke: pp. 23-24; 114-16

Also:

---. “Battle of Britannica.” The Economist 378.8471 (April 1, 2006): 65-66.

Garfinkel, Simson. “Wikipedia and the Meaning of Truth.” Technology Review 111.6 (November/December 2008): 84-86

Recommended:

---. “The Battle for Wikipedia’s Soul.” The Economist 386.8570 (March 8, 2008): 3-4.

---. “The Wiki Principle.” The Economist 378.8474 (April 22, 2006): Special Section, 14-15.

Burbules, Nicholas. “Paradoxes of the Web: The Ethical Dimensions of Credibility.” Library Trends 49.3 (2001): 441-53.

Drobnicki, John and Richard Asaro. "Historical Fabrications on the Internet: Recognition, Evaluation, and Use in Bibliographic Instruction." Reference Librarian 74 (2001): 121-64.

Fallis, Don. "On Verifying the Accuracy of Information: Philosophical Perspectives." Library Trends 52.3 (2004): 463-487. (Read 463-466, paragraph 2; 470 (bottom)-472 (bottom)).

Fallis, Don. "Towards an Epistemology of Wikipedia." Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology 59.10 (August 2008): 1662-74.

Giles, J. "Internet Encyclopedias Go Head to Head." Nature 438.7070 (December 15, 2005): 900-01.

Poe, Marshall. "The Hive." Atlantic 298 (September 2006): 86-94.

Reed, Brock. "'Wikimania' Participants Give the Online Encyclopedia Mixed Reviews." The Chronicle of Higher Education 53 (September 1, 2006): 62.

Rothenberg, David. "How the Web Destroys the Quality of Students' Research Papers." The Chronicle of Higher Education 32 (August 15, 1997): A44.

Schiff, Stacy. "Know it All." The New Yorker 82 (July 23, 2006): 36-43.

Vedder, Anton and Robert Wachbroit. "Reliability of Information on the Internet: Some Distinctions." Ethics and Information Technology 5.4 (2003): 211-15.

Also: Hunter's Reading/Writing Center's handout on web evaluation at <http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/evaluating-web-sources.pdf>.

Homework (due Week 10): Provide citations and annotations for two peer reviewed articles that are relevant to the topic of your final project. Your annotations should justify your choice of articles. The annotations should be 150 words each. Your articles must be indexed in at least one of CUNY's subscription databases. Articles must be at least 7 pages long, excluding references or endnotes. You will be graded on how effectively you meet the above requirements and on the clarity of your prose. Citations in MLA format. You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. Please indicate your topic on your assignment; please attach your articles to your annotations. Each annotation is worth 3% of your final grade.

### **Week 10 (November 11)**

1. Discussion of Wikipedia vs. Gale Virtual Reference Library
2. Google Scholar
3. Citation counts and the quality of peer-reviewed articles
4. Google Scholar and citation counts

Reading: Badke, pp. 88-89; 101-03

Homework (due Week 11): Provide a citation and annotation for one scholarly book that is relevant to the topic of your final project. Your book must be cataloged in CUNY+. You should read at least the introduction to the book, the first chapter too if the introduction is fewer than ten pages. Your annotation should justify your choice of book and should include reference to at least one review of the book that you've consulted, from either *The New Republic*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker* (full length reviews only; avoid "Briefly Noted"), or the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)*, or a peer reviewed journal. The review should be cited in MLA format. Point to consider in the annotation: the author's point of view or biases. You will be graded on how effectively you meet the above requirements and on the clarity of your prose. The annotation should be roughly 250 words. Citations in MLA format. You will lose a full grade if you fail to follow MLA format. Please indicate your topic on your assignment. This assignment is worth 6% of your final grade.

### **Week 11 (November 18)**

1. Presentations
2. Intellectual property, copyright, and fair use

Reading:

Averill, Marilyn. "Intellectual Property." Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics. Ed. Carl Mitcham. Vol. 2. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005: 1030-1034. (In Gale Virtual Reference Library at [library.hunter.cuny.edu/databases](http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/databases); read 1030-33.3)

Hettinger, Edwin. "Justifying Intellectual Property." Philosophy and Public Affairs 18.1 (1989): 31-52. (Read 32.2; 47.4-49.)

**Week 12 (November 25):** Presentations

**Week 13 (December 2):** Presentations

**Week 14 (December 9)**

1. Presentations
2. Review for final exam

**Week 15 (December 16)**

1. Final exam (11:30-12:10)
2. Final papers due