

Laura Melton
LIS 510: Assignment #1: My Information Need

Stage I: Recording/Description

As it is approaching registration time for the winter semester, I needed to decide which courses I wanted to take. I knew that I wanted to take LIS 530 and 540, but I did not know when they would be offered, or by whom. I also knew that I would need another small (1- or 2-credit) course, but I did not know what my options would be. My need was further complicated by the fact that I needed to know whether my schedule would allow me to take a teaching assistant position for the winter quarter.

My search strategy was to follow the links I knew existed on the University of Washington website in order to find the LIS course catalog. I went to MyUW and found the "Course Catalog" link, and from there I found the LIS courses. (I now know that those course listings are also linked from the iSchool's page.)

I found listings for LIS 530 and 540 and decided which sections I would probably take; however, I was unsuccessful in finding another smaller course to fill out my schedule. I know that course listings are currently incomplete; I am sure that in a few days or a week there will be more 1-credit courses to choose from.

My next strategy was to consult with my advisor, who suggested that I take LIS 560 in addition to 530 and 540. She also suggested two 1-credit courses that would be offered. I was unable to decide, and she said that I had time, but that I should ideally decide before getting entry codes.

I then consulted with second-year students who had already taken these courses and received advice about the nature of different professors. The consensus seems to be not to take 540 next quarter, but I think I will anyway. However, I am dissuaded from the idea of taking 560. Based on the information and recommendations given to me by the more experienced students, I know which professors I want for my two major classes, and thus I know when my classes will be.

My next step will be to further consider the possibilities of 1-credit courses offered next quarter. As that information is not yet available on the course schedule, I will have to wait until it becomes available before making my final decision.

Stage II(a): Reflecting/Analysis

My need was fairly simple, both to formulate and to solve, even though I used several sources to gather information. When I started my information search, I had already decided which courses I wanted to take. Even though I knew I could search longer, I thought it logical to start fulfilling my prerequisites, especially since I am particularly interested in cataloging and systems.

I am still fairly muddled about the difference between information want, demand, and need. With such a straightforward need, I am not sure that the difference is more than a shadow. My first need was to know what sections of LIS 530 and 540 would be offered by whom and at what time. The information resource that fulfilled that need was the course schedule on the UW website.

In terms of stages of need, I would be surprised if this fairly routine but important need spent much time in the visceral or conscious stages, especially since the word “registration” has been tossed about so much. “Argh, registration is coming up! I have to register!” is about where I remember my need starting. Before that it was probably subsumed in general anxiety about the future. As for compromising, I have been so indoctrinated in academic-speak for the past ten years (at least) that my formalized need was already “compromised” and expressed in terms of course catalogs and schedules.

When I found the course catalog on the UW website, it was a known-item need and search; I had already visited it in order to register for the fall quarter. I found it easily by following links from MyUW. It was also a self need.

My information seeking for details about LIS 530 and 540 was searching, since it was purposeful, and I knew exactly what I wanted. Afterwards, when I looked over the schedule for other interesting and low-credit courses, I was browsing.

I also gathered information from human sources. I told my advisor what I was planning and what I was looking for, and she made several suggestions. Later I was among other first-year and second-year MLIS students when another first-year asked a second-year for course advice. That way I encountered information about LIS 530, and then I asked my own question about 540.

The information I acquired from the course schedule and from more experienced people was very helpful and useful; it allowed me to make a more informed decision

about what classes I wanted to take during the winter quarter. I would have been at a great disadvantage and probably taken regrettable courses or sections, had I not found the information that I now have at my disposal.

Part II(b):

During the first weeks of this quarter, while we were still in LIS 500 and writing our little web pages for that course, I was in the TE lab, as I often am. Madolyn was sitting next to me, and Pete Adelman was on the other side of her. I had helped Madolyn a little bit with her website (though she later discarded my “help” because she wanted to do it differently), so when Pete expressed his formalized need and asked her if she knew why he couldn’t get his pages to link up, she said “No, but she does,” referring Pete’s question to me.

I got up and went over to his computer to look at what was happening. I won’t go into specifics here, but it turned out that there were a couple of problems. Because I am experienced, both with web design and with helping other people with web design, I easily knew what information was needed in his particular situation. Rather than simply fixing it for him, I explained what was actually happening, from the point of view of the computer. I also explained how he could solve this sort of linking problem in the future by figuring out where the browser is actually looking for a file. Pete won from that information-seeking experience on two counts; not only were his pages fixed, but he knew how to fix them himself the next time a problem cropped up.

(I also won, because now Pete is a very enjoyable friend of mine. If he had not asked for help that day, I might not have become friends with him so soon.)