**Introduction to LIS 571 2012 Spring**

Hello. I am Dagobert Soergel and I welcome you to the online course on the Organization and Control of Recorded Information.

We talk about organizing information for one purpose and one purpose only: to assist users. The needs of the users are central to what we do. We need to assist users in answering questions and solving problems.

This entails, first of all, to assist users in finding information. For many informational professionals, they think their job ends there, but that is only half the story. We need to assist users with understanding the information; that means assimilating information, digesting it, and processing it to answer the questions they have and to apply those answers to solve the problem at hand.

We know pretty well how to find information. The new frontier is to assist users in making sense of it. It may be even better to have a system to process all the raw information and provide a ready-made answer that the user can apply directly, taking a lot of work off the user. Or a system that can read a document and extract the pertinent information, so the user does not have to read the entire thing. These advanced user-friendly functions require sophisticated systems, and we will talk about that as part of the course. Lecture 1.2 is about an expert system that processes various kinds of information to decide on drug prescriptions. Later we will talk about systems for information extraction from text

We also organize information to assist students and others with learning. As every educator knows, learning is much more successful if the information to be learned is well structured. We will discuss principles of information design or document design that include structuring information to support learning, that is assimilating information and making sense of it, as I said before.

Finally, many people these days are not just users of information but also producers of information. Some of them are volunteers, like in social tagging; people tag images on Flickr or documents in LibraryThing and so on. They produce information. Many people produce information as part of their job. In many organizations there are people writing many different types of documents, they produce information. We can help them to produce those documents more efficiently, if we understand and organize the structure of these documents. We will talk more, among other things, about document templates that do that. Say you are hired in a company as a librarian. You see they create all these documents but not very efficiently. So you go to management and say “I know a way to produce these documents more efficiently and to make them better structured.” It might just happen that you get yourself promoted one level up in the hierarchy of the company in charge of organizing the creation and organized storage of all their information.

Many think that this course teaches only theory and don’t see the connection to practice. It is true that this course has a lot of theory, but as Plato and many after him remarked “Nothing is more practical than a good theory.” Now, we could have a course that just talks about the practice of cataloging books for libraries. All you could do with that course is go in a library and catalog books. But there are so many other things out there that require a good knowledge of how to structure information, how to organize information such as database management or information architecture on the Web. With the course that is being offered, you are going to be prepared to enter any of these; you will have the theoretical base needed to acquire the specific practices and skills needed in the specific area you want to enter. The course provides a basis for lifelong learning for whatever job opportunity you can find or make for yourself in a wide arena.

Part of this course is, as I said, how to present information so it is easily assimilated. I am always working to apply these principles to the course materials, to improve and streamline the presentation with the help of students and TAs. If you can see things that are not clear to you or could be presented better, please let me know. Now, if you tell me “I didn’t understand the instructions on the assignments”, that by it self doesn’t help me. If you tell me “I didn’t understand this sentence for this assignment” then I can work on clarifying it.

No course is the work of the instructor alone. It is also the work of the students that help with suggestions and comments to each other. We have it in the classroom and we have that in some ways better and in some ways not as good online. The online discussion will be very important part of the course.

The course is a graduate course so you have to work as graduate students and cope with a graduate student workload. And I hope you will find it interesting enough to find that your effort is repaid in what you learn and what you can do with what you learn and how you can get your mind stretched as we go along. Thinking of structure is not everybody’s cup of tea but you will have to learn it, so you have to stretch and we will help you to do that.

You will work with me and with TA for the course, Amy Miller. I am very accessible through e-mail; if you have any questions, anytime something is not clear or you do not see how a concept applies to practice, send me an e-mail message. Some e-mail messages I will answer individually, if I think the answer will be of interest to the entire class I will send the answer to the entire class. I have worked hard over time to make the assignment instructions clear, but I still get feedback that students do not understand them. Read the assignments before the day they are assigned, and if you have questions email me.

Some of the concepts of this course are somewhat difficult to put on the online medium. In a seated class, I often fill a big blackboard from the top left to the bottom right in and interactive session with students, and the students can see how a total picture emerges from their contributions. We are working on how we can recreate the same lecture experience online; it is not always easy, and you might help to do this. If something did not quite work for you online, let us know. If you have suggestions on how we can do some things better, let us know. Again, as I said the course is not something the instructor does by himself, it is a collaboration of the instructor, the TA, and you the students; so we hope we can develop this online community, which will help everybody to learn, even if the material is sometimes difficult.

With that I wish you a good start of the course, and I hope I will get to know you over the time of the semester. To facilitate this I have one last request. We have the online introductions, which are sort of generic from all of you. We will open a second page, and ask you to give an online introduction slanted to the course.

* What is it that interests you in the course?
* If you have a job now can you give some examples on how you expect to apply what you learn in the course.

Give a profile of yourself to the instructors and to your fellow students that indicates what your interests are slanted towards the course.

I am looking forward to working with you throughout the semester. Good bye.